

A Christmas to Remember



Stories for Young and Old

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Contents

Grandfather Ray's
Christmas Party 3

Love Your Neighbor 8

Peter and the Mermaid 16

The Tailor's Secret 25

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Grandfather Ray's Christmas Party



Marlin Raymond was head librarian of Watercrest's small community library. He had attended Watercrest School when he was young, and later became a history teacher there. He was old now, and although he loved to be around children, his failing health made it impossible for him to keep up with the stress of daily classes.

The town library was Mr. Raymond's life now, a building he rarely left since he rented a small room on the second story. He had never married or had children of his own, but he prided himself in being "Grandfather Ray" to those who knew him. Rumor

had it that he had read every book in the library, and he watched over them with great care. Some joked that after his collie, Minnie, books were his greatest love.

All the children loved Grandfather Ray. They came to the library

more often to attend his weekly “stories from history” corner than to borrow books. For half an hour he held the children captive with his stories, slide shows, movies and talks about the lives of famous people who lived long ago.

He had a special magic about him that put a smile on the face of everyone he met, young or old. It seemed that nothing could dampen his spirit. Grandfather Ray attributed that to the hour he spent in prayer and Bible reading each evening after the library closed.

It was nearly Christmas, and Grandfather Ray hoped to hold a Christmas party for all the Watercrest students at the library the day before Christmas Eve. He planned to turn his history corner into a live manger scene. Joseph, Mary, and a baby in a manger would all be there. — So would a few live sheep and a calf from one of the local farms. After all, Jesus’ birth was a *very* important part of history! Grandfather Ray had many friends, so it was not hard for him to find volunteers to sew the outfits and provide wood, hay and other needed items.

He had only a small income, but he gave all he could and most of his time and effort into making it a fun celebration that was open to the whole community. The Nativity theme was to be a surprise for the children. He sent out an invitation for a Christmas party with a special history corner.

As the day of the celebration drew near, Grandfather Ray meticulously attended to all the details, plans and preparations. He wanted this to be a truly memorable and joyful occasion. He bought a small Christmas tree and decked it with lights and baubles, streamers, candy canes and all sorts of other Christmas decorations.

When the big day arrived, he closed the library from morning until early evening to all but those who came to help him set up. Grandfather Ray was busier than ever, directing the carpenters as they set up the manger scene, and discussing the program with Joseph, Mary, and a sometimes restless baby Jesus. Grandfather Ray hardly remembered to eat or pay much attention to Minnie. He even went the whole day without reading a single book!

There was one thing, however, that he did not forget. Since he would be at the party that evening, Grandfather Ray decided to have his prayer hour earlier in the day. As the old man bowed his head and asked God’s blessing on the party that was only a few hours away, he suddenly had a strange feeling. It seemed to be warning him *not* to

have the manger scene and seating for the party in the usual history corner, but to move everything to the opposite end of the library.

What a crazy thought! he said to himself and tried to brush off the feeling. Not only had he and lots of other people put many hours of work into the preparations, but it was getting late and he was about to dismiss the volunteers who had been helping him. Besides, the history corner had been held in the same area of the library for years. To move the entire set to the less spacious far side of the library on such short notice seemed utterly senseless.

“I must be losing my mind,” he muttered. Still, as the minutes passed he could not shake a growing feeling of absolute urgency that he must move it. Finally Grandfather Ray could take it no more. He went to face the weary volunteers, most of whom needed to get home to their families. How could he ask them to go to so much extra work, all as a result of a feeling he had while praying?

His friends were very fond of him and would do anything for him — well, almost. This sounded so unreasonable, however, that most saw his strange request as a sign of old age and an eccentric old man. After all, they had done so much work and the children would be coming



soon. The thought of moving the manger scene to the far side of the library for no obvious reason seemed absurd.

Most of the volunteers had to go, leaving only a handful to do the job that had taken many more workers hours to set up. Those who remained were touched by Grandfather Ray's determination and conviction that for some unseen reason it *had* to be done. Surprisingly they were able to move it all over in a very short amount of time and finished just as the first children began to arrive.

The evening couldn't have gone better! Almost everyone forgot the odd last-minute move. The children munched on snacks, walked through the "stable," shook hands with the "Holy Family," and took turns holding "baby Jesus," while their parents took pictures or stood around chatting.

Still Grandfather Ray was uneasy. Why had it been necessary to move the entire scene to another area of the library, when the history corner would have done just fine? Was he really losing his marbles? He decided to let the issue lie and enjoy the rest of the party. Calling some of the volunteers, he asked them to bring in the birthday cake. — After all, it *was* Jesus' birthday that they were celebrating this night.

He motioned for all the children to sit down in a semi-circle, facing the manger scene. They all sang "Happy Birthday" and cheered as the cake was brought in.

Suddenly a loud roar from the direction of the history corner interrupted the party. Everyone watched in horror as a huge truck came crashing through the library! The driver had obviously lost control while coming down the nearby expressway ramp. Windows shattered, walls burst and bookshelves collapsed as the truck, now on its side, crushed everything in its path. For a few terrifying seconds it seemed that nothing could stop it or even slow it down as it came crashing towards the frightened crowd.

Yet miraculously it ground to a halt only feet away from the partiers! Frozen with fear, hardly anyone had been able to run or even scream in those agonizing few seconds.

When the noise of the crash subsided, everyone was able to escape the building through a back door and into a parking lot. Some huddled in small groups, some got into their cars, and a few ran around to the front to view the damage. The front wall of the Watercrest library had been demolished. Inside, thousands of books lay scattered on the floor.

Rubble and a large, overturned truck filled what had been the history corner. As the dust settled and rescue workers arrived, the driver was helped from the cab. Thankfully, he appeared to be okay. So was everyone else. The only section of the library that was not destroyed was where the astonished parents and children had been sitting!

It took some time for the survivors to fully realize the miracle that had spared their lives, but that Christmas day every church in the community offered up special prayers of thanksgiving for hav-

ing been spared from a terrible tragedy! Of all those who gave thanks on Christmas, there was none more thankful than Grandfather Ray, who had acted upon a seemingly absurd intuition that God had placed in his heart.



Love Your Neighbor

It was that time of year, and once again the hustle and bustle of Christmas filled the house. Seven-year-old Kate and her parents began decorating and preparing for the festivities in earnest.

“Mom, can I invite Suzie over to play with me one of these evenings?” Kate asked.

“Kate, darling, you know that we have discussed this before. We do not know much about them, and Suzie’s mother is in such poor health that we would rather you do not go around them. It just doesn’t seem right to us. We’ll try to do something together one of these evenings. Let’s just hope your father and I don’t get called back to work during Christmas. If that happens, Linda from next door said she could come and stay with you,” her mother responded.

Kate sighed. Her father was a leading surgeon, and her mother the director at a nearby medical center. *Why does Christmas always have to be such a busy time for them?* she wondered. *Oh well, there’s no sense in hoping for things to be different. That won’t change anything!* With that thought, Kate went back to her coloring.

Kate’s parents had tried their best to instill in Kate a simple faith in God and prayer. But it seemed that as Kate grew older, her parents were away at work more, and they talked less about God. Actually they talked less about *everything* and seldom did things together anymore as a family.

That evening, Kate began to think about what Christmas gifts she would receive. Christmas Eve was only six days away. *Maybe Mother has already done her Christmas shopping, and she’s just keeping it a surprise, so that I won’t try to find where she’s hiding the presents!*

As she got undressed and climbed into her nightgown, another thought troubled Kate. *Why do I receive such nice gifts each year, yet my friend Suzie hardly gets any at all?* Kate sat up in bed and wrapped her hands around her knees as she thought about that. *Oh, I really do hope Suzie gets some nice presents this year!*

With that thought, Kate lay down and fell fast asleep.

The sound of birds chirping outside Kate’s window woke her earlier than usual. As she lay in bed for a moment yawning, she suddenly remembered what she had just been dreaming. In her dream she was

all curled up on her mother's lap looking through a storybook.

Now isn't that odd? I haven't thought of that book for such a long time! Kate pushed her covers back and got out of bed. Hurrying over to her closet, she pulled down a box from the top shelf. *Now where could it be?*

"Ah, here it is!" she said to herself as she brushed the dust from an old book. What wonderful memories it brought back!

Kate flashed back to many cozy evenings by the fireplace with her mom and dad, when they used to read her a chapter of this Bible storybook every night. She smiled as she leafed through the pages. Each picture seemed to bring back a special feeling, a unique memory, and the excitement of hearing each story the first time.

Kate sat down on the floor in the closet. *I remember how we used to pray every night before we went to sleep. Mommy and Daddy taught me to say my prayers, and then they would tuck me into bed. We don't pray together anymore, but I guess that's because they're usually not home when it's my bedtime.*

As Kate flipped through the book, it fell open to a picture of Jesus, surrounded by little children. The Bible verse underneath the picture read: "Ask of Me, and I will give you the desires of your heart."

Hmmm, Kate thought, I seem to remember something Daddy told me once, that if you needed someone's help to do something that no one else could do, then you could ask Jesus, and He would help you. I wonder ... yes! That's what I'm going to do!

Kate set the book on her bedside table, jumped up, grabbed a clean set of clothes from her drawer, and changed out of her nightgown. She brushed her hair and tidied her bed and room. Now she was ready.

She knelt down at the foot of her bed and prayed: "Dear Jesus, I'm so glad I had that nice dream last night about my book. I'm happy that I found it this morning, and that it gave me this idea to talk to You. I want to tell You about my plan for Christmas.

"I have a friend. Her name is Suzie. Suzie's mom is quite sick, and her dad has to go away to work a lot. Suzie doesn't have many toys or nice things. I hope Suzie will get some presents this year."

Kate continued, "But I have something special I want to ask You to do. Well, the problem is ..." Kate whispered the rest of her prayer. At last she finished. "Thank You for listening to me. Well, I'd better go now. Amen!"

Kate slowly got up, hoping that Jesus had heard her prayer. She bounded into the kitchen where Julia the housekeeper had some waffles and hot chocolate waiting for her.

On December 23rd, her mother said she had to go out unexpectedly. To Kate this meant Mom was going shopping for Christmas presents. “Have a good afternoon, Mom!” she called out and waved good-bye from their front window.

Only two days later, and what seemed like forever to Kate, the moment arrived. It was Christmas morning and the sun glistened off the freshly fallen snow covering the trees and walkways. Kate

smiled and raced downstairs to the fireplace where, as always, hung three large Christmas stockings.

Which one is mine? Kate wondered. Just then Dad and Mom walked out of the kitchen with their coffee mugs in hand.

“Good morning, Kate! And happy Christmas! Come give us a hug and kiss!” Mom called out.

“Oh, happy Christmas, Dad and Mom! I love you!” Kate looked up into their eyes, then glanced again at the Christmas stockings.

“Yes, of course you can! Of course you can. Go right ahead,” came the reply.

Kate dashed over to the fireplace. She quickly peeked behind each of the stockings to see which one had her name embroidered on it. The



second stocking she looked behind was hers. She quickly pulled down Dad's stocking and gave it to him, and then took down Mom's and handed it to her.

"Go on! Open them! Open them!" Kate said, with a ring of excitement in her voice.

Then Kate sat on the floor and began pulling the goodies out of her stocking. Once she had discovered all the hidden toys, sweets and treats, she knew the time for opening the gifts under the tree was just about to begin.

"Okay, it's time!" said Dad. "Go over to the tree and see what was brought your way this Christmas."

Kate's eyes twinkled as she carried her overflowing stocking toward the tree. She began pulling out presents from under the tree and reading off the names.

"This one is for you, Daddy ... and this one is for you, Mom! Oh, and here's one for me!" she said, as she began to unwrap her gifts.

Before long, half an hour had passed in this joyous fashion. Kate hardly noticed the cheery Christmas carols playing in the background. She was too busy opening presents and helping her parents to open theirs.

Finally all the presents were open. Kate gave both her parents a big hug and kiss and thanked them for each gift. She sat with her back to the beautifully decorated Christmas tree and thought to herself, *I wonder what Suzie got for Christmas.*

"Now, let's be off! We have a Christmas day to spend together, dear girl!" Dad said. "Grab your coat and off we go!"

Just then the phone rang, and Mom went into the kitchen to answer it. Kate carried her presents upstairs to her room. When she came back downstairs with her coat, she saw Mom and Dad talking together anxiously.

"What is it, Dad?" Kate asked.

"Honey, I'm so sorry. An emergency has come up at the center and we both have to go immediately. It may take several hours to take care of this."

Kate's face registered her disappointment.

"Darling, I know this is difficult for you. We'll try to be back just as soon as we can, and then we'll have a special evening and dinner together, all right?"

“We love you, sweetheart. See you soon!” Dad called out, as they both hurried out.

“Since Julia has the day off, Linda will come and stay with you. If you need any help just tell her. Oh, here she comes now,” Mom called back.

“Wait a minute!” Kate cried. Her eyes lit up with a plan as she tapped on the car window. “I ... I know we’ve talked about this before, but since I’m home all alone today, could I please invite Suzie over ... just for an hour? Or we could play at the park if she can’t come to our house. Please?”

There wasn’t time to waste. Dad spoke up first, “Okay, Kate. Since it’s Christmas.”

“But dear, it’s much too cold to play out in the park for an hour,” Mom added. “You can play inside.”

“Okay! Thank you!”

That lifted Kate’s heart. At least she would have someone her own age to play with. Kate ran inside, quickly put on her boots and she and Linda headed down the street to Suzie’s house.

Suzie and her mother, Elsie, lived in a small, rundown little house a block away. Suzie’s father had not been able to come home for Christmas. Ever since the local factory cut back on workers, he had to go to another city to find work. Elsie was very weak and ill most of the time. Kate often wanted to play with Suzie, as she had no brothers or sisters of her own, but Kate’s parents did not allow it. They didn’t like the thought of Kate being around Elsie, as she was so sickly, though her illness was not supposed to be contagious. Kate wondered if they didn’t want her to be around them because they were so poor.

While Linda chatted with one of her friends out on the street, Kate rang the doorbell and waited. It always took Elsie a long time to answer the door.

“Can Suzie come over and play at my house for a while?” Kate asked. “My parents had to go to work, but Linda will be there to look after us.” Elsie smiled and went to call Suzie.

“Kate! Hi! Come in! I’m so glad you came over!”

“Hi, Suzie!”

Suzie’s home was different from Kate’s. Their furniture was shabby, and they didn’t have much of a Christmas tree at all. Still, there was a look of peace and happiness in their eyes that seemed to brighten the room.

Suzie was Kate's age and a wonderful friend to play with. Kate's eyes raced around the room hoping to see some trace of presents. Nothing! *I wonder if Suzie got any Christmas presents at all?* Kate thought.

"Would you like to come over and play?" Kate asked.

"Sure! Come on! Let's not waste any time! I'll race you!" Suzie said cheerfully.

In no time, Kate and Suzie were back at Kate's house. As they played, they forgot all about the time and enjoyed two hours of wonderful fun together. Linda was listening to music and reading a new book. The hourly chime on the old grandfather clock in the den reminded Kate that she had promised her parents she would only play with Suzie for one hour.

"Oh my, my parents may be coming home soon, so I guess we will have to stop playing. Let's ask Linda to walk us back to your house," Kate suggested. "Thanks for coming over. It was so much fun being with you."



"I had a great time too. You're a super friend," Suzie said happily.

As they stepped inside Suzie's house, Elsie called out, "Suzie dear, come here for a minute."

Suzie went in to see her mother, and Kate and Linda could hear them faintly as they waited in the hall. Then Suzie came out, carrying a large cardboard box in her arms.

"What's that?" Kate asked.

"I don't know. Mom just told me that while you and I were playing at your house, the doorbell rang. Mom was resting, and it took her awhile to get up.

By the time she got to the door, there was no one there — just this box ... of Christmas presents! Look! They're all wrapped nicely. Some have my name on them and some have Mom's and Dad's names on them!"

Kate could hardly contain her happiness for her friend. Suzie was bouncing up and down with excitement. "It's so amazing! We didn't have any money to buy presents this Christmas, so I just figured we weren't going to have any. Last night when we prayed together, we thanked God that we had each other and my daddy, even if we didn't have any presents. But then look what God sent us this morning!"

"That's wonderful! I'm so happy for you!" Kate exclaimed. Kate and Suzie gave each other a big hug.

"Oh my! Look at the time!" Linda interrupted. "I'd better get you home now. Your parents will probably be home any minute, and you should be there when they get back." Kate thanked Elsie, waved goodbye to Suzie, and they headed back towards her house. Kate was so happy for her friend that she sang all the way home.

Just as she took off her coat and boots, she heard a car pull up in the driveway. Kate looked out the window. Her mom and dad were smiling. Things must have gone well at the center.

The door swung open. "Kate! We're home!" Dad called out.

"I'm so glad," Kate responded.

"Did you get to play with your friend Suzie?" Mom asked, as soon as she had thanked Linda and paid her for her help.

"You won't believe this, but Suzie got some presents this year! I was really hoping she would!" Kate was bubbling over as she told her parents the whole story.

Dad and Mom smiled warmly at Kate and then at each other. "Honey," Dad began, "your mom and I have been talking about something. We'd like to go over and ask Elsie and Suzie to join us for Christmas dinner. We feel very badly that we haven't been more kind to them, and that we've stayed away from them. It's fine for you to be friends with Suzie and play with her, and we'd like to be friends with Elsie and help their family. We want to be the kind of neighbors that the Bible talks about."

Kate could hardly believe her ears. This was almost too good to be true — but it *was* true.

"Daddy! Mommy! He heard! He heard! He heard my prayer! That's it! That's what I asked Jesus to do, to let me play more with Suzie! He



answered! He did it! I didn't tell anybody else! Nobody else in the whole world knew! But *Jesus* knew!" Kate jumped up and down for joy.

Then she told her parents all about her dream, about the Bible storybook, and about the prayer she had prayed to Jesus.

A tear rolled down Mother's cheek. That night two families were brought together by a child's love and a Christmas prayer. From that grew a lifelong friendship between Kate and Suzie and their families, and each Christmas after that held a special sense of wonder for them all.

Peter and the Mermaid

Peter liked to imagine things, so much so that sometimes he had to stop and think if something really happened or if he just made it up in his mind. This story is about one such memory that Peter had. Since Peter is not sure himself what was real and what he imagined, you will have to decide for yourself as you read this story. One thing is certain, something very out of the ordinary did happen to Peter one day down by the sea.



One quiet morning Peter sat on a rock staring out at the peaceful blue-green sea. Like many other eight-year-olds, at times Peter got quite bored and discouraged. Poor Peter! Well, actually, Peter was not poor at all. His family was very rich, but they were often busy and did not have much time for Peter.

Whenever Peter felt sad or lonely, he left his beautiful house to walk along the seashore or climb on some big rocks by the sea. There he sat and thought about things and watched the fishing boats pass by.

Peter had a very nice room and lots of toys, but being by the sea was special. He loved to feel the salty water splash and spray and tickle his bare feet. Out there on a peaceful day, sitting among the rocks, he had time to think about things that mattered to him and search for answers to his problems.

One day when he felt especially sad and alone and was sitting on one of his favorite rocks, he met someone, a friend he could talk things over with. No, it wasn't a whale, or seagull, or a dolphin! Peter's friend was a beautiful mermaid, and her name was Fancytail.

Fancytail had long blonde hair, sparkling blue eyes, and her tail was covered with iridescent scales that scintillated with a marvelous mix of pink and gold.

From that day on, Fancytail would appear when Peter really needed to talk to her. Often when he whistled, she would appear. Fancytail was the one friend who really seemed to understand him, and Peter felt he understood her as well. Though she seemed quite small and fragile, she was always a great help to Peter when he was in trouble, or felt down or terribly bored.

She would swim over and listen to his problems, and move her tail in sympathy. Sometimes she would even cry with him when he was feeling

particularly discouraged. She was a very good listener to whatever Peter had to say to her. When it was time for Peter to go, she would wave good-bye and swim back out to the deep sea. When he had an especially tough problem to solve, she promised him that when she got home she would talk with the great Father of all living things about it and try to find ways to help him.



On this fine morning, Christmas was only two days away, but again Peter was lonely, sad, and bored. And so, he came to talk to Fancytail.

“Peter, why are you so sad today?” Fancytail asked.

“Oh, Fancytail! *Nobody* knows how I feel, how miserable I feel!”

“Oh, Peter! I have never seen you *this* unhappy before. What is it?” Fancytail shook the water from her hair, and got ready to listen to her friend.

Peter began, “Well, everybody is happy that Christmas is coming. My relatives are getting louder and louder — all the time talking about what they want to have for Christmas, what kind of food to prepare, what to wear, what presents to buy, what parties to arrange. My mom said she wants a new Porsche. My sister said she wants diamond earrings for her collection. My older brother wants to go to Hawaii. My daddy wants a new boat and a new gold watch. But I don’t want *any* more things. More things don’t seem to make me happy and I just want to be happy. What should I do?”

Fancytail’s eyes were so full of love and understanding. Peter looked at her sweet happy face, now looking so sad for his sake. He couldn’t help but smile. She had a special way of making him feel good, even



when he felt *terrible*.

How does she do that? he wondered.

Peter wished he didn't have to go home so soon, but he did. "I'll come and see you tomorrow again. Okay?"

Fancytail nodded and blew him a kiss, smiled her big smile, waved good-bye, and dove back into the sea.

Fancytail lived in a beautiful little garden, deep down in the sea. In her garden were sea flowers of all different shapes and colors — red, yellow, orange and shiny blue. Some of the plants could even talk with her, and different friendly fish would often come to visit her there.

She was safe and protected in her undersea garden, but there were many dangers for Fancytail in the open ocean waters. She always had to be cautious and protect herself whenever she went up to see Peter, for there were many fierce creatures that wanted to hurt her, or even try to eat her. Fancytail knew her way around, but she was clever enough to seldom go anywhere alone. Whenever she ventured into dangerous waters, her good friend Strong-Sword went with her to protect her. And he did a very good job of it, for he was a large swordfish with a big strong sword.

It was not easy for Fancytail to leave her heavenly sea garden to go and see Peter. However, because she was concerned for him and wanted to help, she risked swimming in dangerous waters where fierce creatures of the sea lurked, past the fishermen's boats and their entangling nets, just to be with him.



The following day Peter returned to his favorite place by the sea and whistled. Fancytail did not appear! *Where could she be?* he wondered. *I hope she is okay. She is so small and the sea can be a very dangerous place.* Peter comforted himself remembering that Fancytail also had Someone to take her troubles to and Who helped look after her, the great and wise Father of all living things.

That very morning Fancytail had been pleading for help, "Master of all creatures great and small, I need Your help. The land-creature Peter is *so* unhappy. Is there anything we can do to make this Christmas a special and meaningful time that he will remember forever?"

"Well, Fancytail, I agree with you about Peter needing our help. He is a special person. All the toys and games and new bikes and belongings that he is given do not satisfy him. *Things* cannot make Peter happy, for Peter's happiness can only come through making others happy. Deep down

inside, that's his heart's real desire — but he doesn't know that yet.”

The Great Creator then gave Fancytail a magic rod, and told her, “Go with Strong-Sword back to the shore where Peter has come to talk to you. Touch two of Peter's favorite rocks with the magic rod and you will see something wonderful happen.”

Fancytail set out immediately. The journey was perilous, for no sooner had Fancytail and Strong-Sword set out than two large tiger sharks began following them. Like wolves pursuing their prey, they moved in closer. Their tactic was to attack from both sides. Strong-Sword was brave and more than a match for them, but he could not be in two places at once. They attacked suddenly!

Strong-Sword turned and dealt a punishing blow to the great shark closest to him, but as soon as he turned, Fancytail had to bravely face her other attacker. Only Fancytail's great speed and agility kept her from those terrible jaws.

Having missed on his first pass, the great shark turned for a second attempt, and was gaining on her.

“Oh, Great Father of Life, help me!” she prayed. Instantly she heard a comforting voice telling her to use the rod she had been given, to strike her attacker. As the shark closed in on her, Fancytail bravely raised the rod and thrust it forward, hitting him hard on his nose.



A strange thing then happened. The great shark turned to stone before her very eyes, and tumbled down, down, down, to the ocean floor! Strong-Sword's opponent had turned and fled in fear, and Strong-Sword came to her rescue, just in time to see the other shark suddenly being transformed into stone.

Fancytail and her faithful friend safely completed their journey to the rocky shoreline close to Peter's house. In the distance she could see Peter making his way home. His head was down and he was obviously sad and disappointed that she had not been there. Fancytail called to him but he could not hear her above the sound of the waves. Just as he was about to leave the beach Peter stopped and turned for one last look, hoping that Fancytail might have come after all. A huge swordfish surfaced and leaped out of the water.

"That's Strong-Sword! Fancytail came after all!" Happy and relieved, Peter began to run back toward his favorite place in the rocks. As he drew closer, he saw Fancytail with a rod in her hand.

Fancytail swam by one of Peter's favorite rocks and touched it with the rod. Suddenly it was transformed into a handsome prince! Peter stood speechless. Fancytail then touched another rock. Instantly, the second rock came to life and became a beautiful princess.

The charming young prince and lovely princess turned and began to walk towards Peter. Fancytail was ecstatic, marveling at the wonder she was seeing.

"Unbelievable!" gasped Peter, smiling at them. "I have never seen people so perfect and beautiful in my whole life!"

They smiled back, and the prince spoke first. "My name is Prince Kindheart and this is Princess Brightlight. We want to help you learn how to be happy."

Then the princess spoke, "Peter, we have come to invite you on a special adventure. If you find yourself lonely or bored with nothing to do on Christmas day, then we will take you for a visit to our world. Just touch one of the rocks we appeared from and the adventure will begin."

"Oh, yes!" Peter exclaimed. "That sounds like *so* much fun! Yahoooooo! Can we do it right now?"

"Not today," said Prince Kindheart, "for this trip can only be made on Christmas day."



Christmas morning arrived. It was a bright and cheery day. As

usual, Peter found a mountain of presents for him under the tree. His father made a quick appearance to wish him a merry Christmas, before hurrying off to make some important phone calls. His mother stayed for a few minutes to watch Peter open presents, but she soon hurried off to get herself ready for the guests she expected later in the day. Peter was alone again.

“I’m going to be down on the beach with some friends. I’ll be back in a few hours!” he called out to his mother as he went out the door.

“That’s nice, dear,” came his mother’s response. Clearly she had not really paid much attention to what he said, her mind was filled with her other plans.

On what should have been such a happy day, Peter still felt sad, alone, and unnoticed. Tears filled his eyes as he hurried across the beach to his favorite place among the rocks. He wondered if the handsome prince and the beautiful princess would keep their word, and let him come and visit their world for a short time.

Fancytail was nowhere to be seen, so after taking a deep breath, not knowing what to expect, Peter reached down and touched the rocks where the prince and princess had appeared the day before. Instantly Prince Kindheart and Princess Brightlight stood before him.

The princess smiled and took Peter by the hand. “Are you ready for an adventure?” she asked.

“Yes!” Peter replied eagerly.

In an instant they were transported to a wonderful place.

“Ooooh!” Peter gasped in amazement when suddenly they were standing in a wondrous park by a magnificent castle. “I have never seen such a place as this! There are so many birds and flowers and all kinds of fruit trees. Things seem to be see-through here, almost like colored glass. Look! Even that golden pear is almost see-through! Can I eat it?”

“Of course,” the prince laughed, reaching up and picking the pear. He handed it to Peter, who tasted it immediately.

“Mmmmmm! It’s delicious! This place is wild!”

Off to one side of the palace garden grounds, patterns of sparkling, colored light danced like happy children.

“What are those?” Peter asked Princess Brightlight.

“Those are many more happy thoughts and places. When you get close to them and touch any of the colors, they will take you on further adventures to see and do things you’ve never dreamed of.”

Peter noticed that several of the flowers nearby appeared to be moving, and some even appeared to have mouths and smiling faces. “Those big flowers over there look like they have faces and are talking! Are they?” he asked.

Prince Kindheart replied, “Oh, yes! They are always talking to each other, and if you get close, they will talk to you too.”

“It’s so wonderful here!” Peter exclaimed. “I would never get bored here. There is so much to do!”

There was a marvelous playground area with the most amazing rides and things to do, and friendly animals were everywhere. Peter’s favorite was the magical boat ride along the crystal stream, seeing and talking to all the friendly animals along the way.

“I have never had so much fun in my whole life. I am so glad you let me visit you.”

“There is another place we want you to see before you go home, Peter,” Prince Kindheart said. “It isn’t fun like this place, but there are many people there who need you.”

Then Prince Kindheart and Princess Brightlight took Peter by each hand and flew with him up and up into the sky.

“Wow!” Peter exclaimed, “I’m *flying*! Where are we going?”

“We want to take you to some different places in your *own* world that you have never seen, but where there are people who need your help,” Princess Brightlight explained.

As they flew down



through a large white fluffy cloud, Peter knew they were back in his own world. Far below, Peter could see the streets of a city. It was cold there, and everyone they passed seemed sad and so very poor. They looked like refugees of some war, who were now homeless.

As they flew down closer, Peter could see right into their hearts. His loneliness, sadness and problems looked so small compared to what these people were suffering. This Christmas day was not a happy day for them. They were all very poor now, though some of them had once lived in nice homes. Many had lost their families and loved ones, were sick or hurt, hungry and in despair — and *everyone* needed someone to encourage and love them.

One small boy and his sister sat sadly on a doorstep. Peter asked if he could stop to talk to them and the prince and princess brought him down to the ground. The children told Peter all about their lives. What he heard made Peter feel very sorry for them and very thankful for all the good things he had, which he often took for granted. He had a home and family, and he wasn't sick or hungry.

Peter had some spending money in his pocket which he gave to the children. As he said good-bye to them, a thought crossed his mind. *Maybe I could get Father and Mother to come and help some of these people! Maybe we could bring them some of the things they need!*

For the first time, Peter felt very needed, and that he had a very, very important job to do. This feeling made Peter happy. He didn't feel sad, lonely or bored any more. He was needed, and there were important things to do because so many people needed his help!

Peter met many more children that day, and sat and listened to their sad stories. He had learned much from Fancytail, and knew how important it was to have someone listen when he was sad and hurt inside.

Peter decided he wanted to help others. It would be a very difficult job, but somehow just knowing how much they needed him made him very happy.

Then the prince and princess took Peter to one more place — the home of a poor family not far from Peter's house. There were no piles of Christmas presents in that home. A tired mother comforted a crying baby, while a shabbily-dressed girl tried to prepare a simple meal to feed her hungry brothers and sisters.

"Oh, I want to help these people!" said Peter, turning to Prince Kindheart and Princess Brightlight.

“Perhaps you can!” answered the princess, and in an instant the journey was over. Peter was suddenly by himself back on the rocky shore where his travels had begun. In the sky above he thought he caught a glimpse of the kind prince and princess waving good-bye to him. He felt a little alone and sad again, and wondered if he would ever see the prince and princess again. He did not have time to think too much about that now, because he needed to hurry home. After all, he had a *lot* to do!

He stopped and looked out to the sea for a moment. Would he ever see Fancytail again? Then he saw her off shore — she was waving good-bye, and with a flash and splash of her tail she was gone.

What a good friend she has been! he thought as he waved, and headed back to his house.



Mother listened for a moment to Peter’s wild tale about meeting the prince and princess, and how important it was to be kind and help others and show them that someone cares for them, and how thankful he now was to have a mommy and daddy and that he had good health and all the other blessings he had taken for granted, and he wanted to help all those who didn’t have what he had.

Tears welled up in his mother’s eyes. Feelings of tenderness and concern for others that had too long been crowded out by her busy social life now overwhelmed her. Hugging Peter tightly she whispered, “That’s a wonderful thing to do, dear, and I’d like to help you. Right now, our guests are about to arrive, and you need to get ready too! But once they are gone I want us to start on this new adventure together.”

“You promise?” Peter asked.

“I promise,” she replied. Then as she remembered another concern, added, “And will you promise that you’ll not go anywhere alone with any people I don’t know unless you let me know about it? I was so worried about you this afternoon when you were gone.”

“You were? I’m sorry, Mom!” Peter said.

After a kiss and another warm hug that seemed to mark the beginning of a new and better life together, Peter bounded up the stairs to his room. The big pile of Christmas presents he had received covered his bed. He remembered the poor children who lived nearby, who he had seen that day in his travels. He knew just what he had to do and where to begin. Peter was very, very happy.

The Tailor's Secret

Few people seemed to take much notice of the lonely, grief-stricken old man. Klaus and his wife had moved north to Finland to escape the war and turmoil in their homeland. In time and in his new home he became a successful tailor. Then the terrible flu epidemic came and took the lives of his wife and two children — and left him feeling he had little reason to go on living. No longer the happy, cheerful soul he had once been, Klaus aimlessly wandered the cold streets of Helsinki during the day and collapsed on a cot in his cold empty workshop at night. He no longer did tailor work. He couldn't if he wanted to for he had sold or traded everything of value for food and fuel. His clothes were tattered, his head hung low, and his feet dragged. His hair and beard, now white, had grown wild and tangled. Those who had known him before could now hardly recognize him!



Whenever his departed wife, Gertrude,



and his children looked down from Heaven, they were heartbroken at what they saw. Gertrude often pled for her husband's sanity before the throne of God, and God always comforted her.

"At just the right moment," He would say, "a ray of light and hope and new purpose will shine through the dark clouds that hang over Klaus' life."

Then God would let her go to Klaus' side. From the unseen realm of the spirit she would whisper words of love and encouragement to her poor husband's heart.

As time passed and Klaus' condition did not improve, Gertrude was certain that her loved one had reached the end of his rope. She again came sorrowfully before God.

This time God announced, "The time has come at last! Your husband is about to turn his eyes from his own sorrow, and see the needs of others. The moment he does, I will work the miracle."



It was winter, and as usual Helsinki was very cold with only a few hours of sunlight each day. Tradesmen worked at their crafts in cozy workshops by glowing fires. Women left the warmth of their kitchens only for hurried trips to shops — nothing more. Only the children seemed to venture more than a few blocks from home. Wherever they lived, it never seemed too far to walk to "Children's Lane," where the town's renowned toy makers worked their magic. Some folks said that gifted saints and angels gave the toy makers their ideas. Along "Children's Lane," window after window was filled with toys which delighted the children's eyes and set their minds awirl!

Klaus loved children, but whenever he would stop to watch them as they played or looked at the toys in the toy shop windows, they would remind him of his own children and each time his heart would break all over again, and tears would tumble down his cheeks.

One day Klaus noticed a small boy in clothes nearly as tattered as his own, gazing at the toys in a shop window. The look of hopelessness and disappointment on the boy's face told Klaus just what the boy was thinking: *I'll never know what it's like to have such fine toys as those!*

Klaus began to cry, but for the first time in a very long time, Klaus wasn't crying for himself. His tears were for the little boy and the hun-

dreds of other poor children like him.

The image of the small boy lingered in Klaus' mind as he went on his way. Scarcely thinking about where his feet were taking him, Klaus eventually found himself at a small ravine on the edge of town, where people dumped their junk and trash. For some unexplainable reason, Klaus began to feel happy and hopeful. How long had it been since he had felt that way?

A newly discarded doll lay lifeless and in pieces on one of the trash heaps still not covered with snow. Klaus bent over and picked up the pieces.

Put them together, Klaus, whispered Gertrude to his heart.

Without knowing why, Klaus put the doll back together. Was it Klaus' imagination, or did the doll open her eyes and look at him as if she was alive? *Thank you for giving me back my life!* she seemed to say.

Klaus looked at her and smiled. "You're welcome!" he said out loud.

There was no one there to see or hear him, but Klaus suddenly felt very foolish and tossed the doll back onto the junk pile.

Immediately a great sadness filled his heart.

He picked up the doll again, and happiness filled his heart once more. *How strange!* thought Klaus.

Then he pulled an armless teddy bear from another pile of trash.

How nice it would be if these broken toys could be repaired and given to the children of poor families. How happy they all would be! Klaus thought. *But what can I do about it? I am just a poor broken old man myself, and I have no tools — no needles or thread or material to mend them with!*

A voice from Heaven seemed to speak to him, *With God, nothing is impossible! Where God guides, He provides. Look around!*

Still not understanding what was happening, Klaus started looking through the junk that was scattered around. Suddenly he spotted a battered wooden box. It looked worthless, but when Klaus lifted the lid, he was in for a big surprise!

It was full of *tools* — everything he needed for the job! The tools were old and a little rusty, of course, but he could scrub and sharpen them and they would be as good as new. In one compartment of the box was a sewing kit with needles of all sizes, and thread in many different colors.

That's a wonder! Klaus thought as a new idea formed in his mind. *What if ... ? What if I collect all the broken toys I can find and I fix them and give them to poor children for Christmas?*

In Heaven, Gertrude and all those helping her jumped for joy! God's promise was coming true!

Klaus didn't waste a minute. For the next few days he collected broken toys, and took special notice or quietly asked where each needy child in town lived. This information he wrote down in a small book. Klaus then spent many days repairing, mending, gluing and stuffing toys. So absorbed was Klaus in the task at hand that he often forgot to eat.

In a few days it will be Christmas, he kept thinking, *and the children from the poor families need to have toys of their own. How I want them all to be happy!*

Harder and harder he worked, late into each night, until his fingers ached, his eyes grew blurry, and he fell asleep in his chair. At dawn's first light, Klaus would awake and continue his labor of love.

Klaus felt wonderful inside. On Christmas Eve his task was finally completed! Every child in his book would get a present. Seven big bags



filled with beautiful toys sat on the floor of his workshop — all brought back to life by the worn old hands of the tailor.

But how shall I give them to the children? Klaus asked himself. *They must not think that the toys are from me, for truly they are gifts of love from God's own heart!*

Disguise yourself and give them away at night! whispered Gertrude. And so he did.

Christmas Eve was cold and blustery. Just before midnight, Klaus loaded the bags of toys onto a big sled he had once pulled his own children around on, one of his few remaining possessions. The load of toys was heavy and he struggled to pull it through the snow. From street to street he went, leaving a package, or a few packages on the doorstep of each house where a poor family lived. In each package was a toy for some child in the house, and on each toy was a little note that said,

“To you with love,
From God Above.”

Peace at last filled Klaus' heart.

On Christmas morning the poor of the town awoke to the wonderful surprise. Some thanked God for what seemed to be a miracle; some didn't know what to think, but were glad to see their children happy. Some said they had seen an old man covered with snow distribute the packages. Others said they had seen a mysterious sleigh loaded with many big bags. The story grew until finally it was said that the sleigh was pulled by reindeer, and had come down from Heaven!

Well, much of the story was true! There was an old man, covered with snow, and there was a sled filled with bags. And yes, in a sense, they *did* come from Heaven, for God was surely behind it all!

Klaus spent the next year quietly collecting and fixing broken toys. How happy that made him!

And when Christmas came again, Klaus once more made his secret rounds to deliver toys to all the poor children. Then, exhausted from a long night's work, Klaus passed away in the early quiet of Christmas morning. Most people in the town didn't even notice he was gone, but what a party they had where he went! Klaus was reunited with his wife and children, and all Heaven rejoiced.

“What you did was wonderful,” God told Klaus, “but it doesn't have to end there. *All* children need to experience My love. Will you

help Me give it to them?”

Gertrude’s prayer for her husband had been answered and would continue to be answered. Klaus was happier than he ever thought possible. He began doing all he could to help children around the world, whispering in their hearts and encouraging them, as Gertrude had done for him. What joy he felt as the children opened their hearts to God’s love and their lives became happier.



Make this a “Christmas to Remember” by getting to know the One who started Christmas. Meet the giver of the love and joy shared by millions on this special occasion. It’s simple! Just open your heart to Jesus. Ask Him to fill you with His love, peace and joy forever. If you ask Him, He’ll come in and be with you always. He loves you!

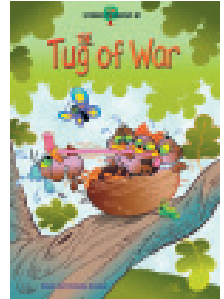


Trudge and Zippy

Two fun animal friends with very different characters share a day at the carnival and are brought closer to God and to each other through a serious turn of events. With beautiful color illustrations throughout that your child will love!

Tug of War

Billy, Reddy, Cherry and Chirpy are four little baby robins with a variety of personalities and preferences, huge appetites, and a few things to learn about manners! Find out what happens when Mama and Papa Robin fly away to find food, and Billy has his first brush with danger.



Farmyard Heroes

Jenny the baby chick wanted more action and adventure in her life, but she could not have guessed how suddenly her world was about to change!

Feed My Lambs

Jesus said, "If you love Me ... feed My lambs." (John 21:15.) This series of seven booklets helps you to do just that! Highly illustrated, these simplified Bible verses help your children commit meaningful Scripture to memory.



STORIES TO GROW BY

A Christmas to Remember

Why does Grandfather Ray suddenly change his plans for the Christmas party?

Is there anything Kate can do to help her friend this Christmas?

Does Peter really have a mermaid friend? And where does he go one lonely Christmas afternoon?

Klaus is sad and discouraged, but his life is about to change drastically! Who is helping him?

Find the answers to these questions and more in *A Christmas to Remember*.

