



## The Jesus Nativity

“Oh, Mother! What shall I do?” Little Mary burst into the house in her most exasperating tones.

“What shall you do about what, my dear?...”

Windowed Heather Sanders and her nine-year-old daughter, Mary, lived by themselves in the small, rented Hadley’s place. Since losing her husband, Mother Sanders (as she was affectionately called) sometimes found it hard to make the “two ends meet.” But overall, through all the ironing, sewing, and God’s constant provision, Mother Sanders and Mary found themselves constantly satisfied; and Mary knew no need of anything, that is, until this cold December morning of 1886....

“Why,” Mary began again, “in Sunday school class Miss Rubert set a table out for all the children to put something on it—wrapped up all nicely, of course!—for the poor, ragged children to come in and pick a Christmas gift for their very own.”

“And?” Mother pressed.

“And, well, I don’t know what to give. I don’t own a single thing to my name. And that’s that.” Mary ended the flow of sentences with a rush of tears.

“There, there.” Her mother soothed, “I don’t think you need—” Mother Sanders began to resolve, but after looking into Mary’s wandering eyes stopped herself, realizing that little Mary wasn’t wishing to hear that she didn’t need to give anything but what she might give. “Come, little one. Let’s go see what we can find.” Mother stated happily with a start towards the kitchen. “Let’s see.... the neighbor Mrs. Skooner insisted on my taking these sweet potatoes. I was planning on us having them to go with the Christmas dinner, but, of course, they’re not necessary. You can wrap them up ‘all nicely’ as you say, and that would easily suffice as a poor boy or girl’s dinner.” Mother offered and glanced down to see a once more disturbed Mary.

“But, because they’re not mine, I’m not really giving anything. I mean, since I don’t own the sweet potatoes, they wouldn’t really be from me.” Mary persisted.

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that. I understand what you mean though, and perhaps, it would be best for the gift to be something of your very own. What do you want to give?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” Mary said forlornly and ended with a short sigh. Mother Sanders smiled at the thought of her little Mary being so worried about what she could give and silently thanked God for her child, young as she was, learning the “gift of giving.”

Mary gasped as her whole face lit up with excitement. “I know! I can wrap the gift with

that bag that Fanny May gave me last year for Christmas.”

“Oh, Mary! You can’t give that gift bag away. That’s the last thing that your best friend gave you before she died. It’s the only memory you have of Fanny. Why, you told me you would never give it away. Really, I think you can just as well wrap your gift in something plain rather than using your gift bag from Fanny that you love so much.

“No. My mind is made up.” Mother’s words apparently had little effect on Mary. Mary continued, “I really want to *give* something. I want to give my all; God gave his all when he gave His Son. Besides, Fanny, I know, would want me to use the bag. And it’s not the only memory I have of her; there are many more. But, of course, if you don’t want me to, I won’t.”

“No, no. It’s your choice. If you feel like you ought to give the gift bag, then, of course, you should.”

“Well, then I’m going to go fetch it!” Mary called over her shoulder as she ran to her room.

“Don’t be gone long. Supper will be ready shortly.”

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Knock. Knock.

“Come in.”

“Good morning, Mrs. Cartwright!”

“Why, hello there, Mary. Come on in and sit down. Let’s have us a little talk...”

Having settled on how the gift should be wrapped, Mary talked with her mother about what the gift should be. Mary pondered over what she should or rather could give until she came up with an idea while she sat gazing out the window at a neighbor’s nativity display.

“Mother, Mother! I’ve got it! I know just what I’ll give.”

“What? What is it?” Mother asked as she sat laughing at her daughter’s childish glee.

“I’ll make a nativity.”

“That’s a great idea.” Mother encouraged.

“It will have three pieces. Most nativities do, right?” Mary continued.

“Yes. Joseph, Mary, and Baby Jesus.”

“No. No. It won’t have Joseph and Mary in it.” Mary corrected.

“It won’t? Wise men and shepherds?” Mother guessed.

“No, no. It won’t be that at all.” Mary again explained.





“It won’t? I thought you said it was going to be a nativity.? Mother further questioned.

“It will” Then seeing Mother’s very confused face, Mary explained more. “It will be a nativity: a Jesus nativity. It will have Jesus’ manger, cross, and tomb.”

Mother Sanders, touched to the very heart, was speechless. With tears in her eyes, she softly whispered, “Oh the faith of a child!” Then she said, “Mary that would make a wonderful gift. And such a beautiful picture! What will you use to make it?”

“Cardboard I guess.”

“That would work.”

“Do you think Mrs. Cartwright would have any extra cardboard? She used to fold boxes for that hat place.”

“Yes. I would ask her. She might, but she hasn’t worked for them for some time now. But if not, I’m sure there’s someone who would have some for you....”

Mary finished relaying last night’s talk and summed it up with her question, “Do you have any extra cardboard that I could have?”

“Oh, Honey, I only wish I did. But my goodness, you must understand it’s been nearly twenty years since I last set foot in Johnson’s Hat Company, and so, naturally I’ve exhausted what boxes I had left. However, don’t get me wrong, in that I think it’s a great idea, and I hope you get to carry it through!

“Thanks all the same, Mrs. Cartwright.”

“No problem. I just wish I could have been of more help.”

“Oh, that’s all right, but if you know of someone else who might have some cardboard, I’d greatly appreciate it.”

“Yeah, you could check over at Clara Hardtackles. She used to collect cardboard boxes for functions at the church. (I’m not sure what the church used the boxes for, but anyway that’s what she did. But like me, that was years back, so it’s unlikely she’ll still have some but worth a shot.”

“Okay, I’ll check. Thanks again and goodbye!”

“Goodbye, Mary.”

Mary thought to herself, *There’s one option gone. Hopefully, Miss Clara will have some cardboard....*

“Nope. I’m sorry, Mary; but I haven’t collected boxes for my church’s Gingerbox

Outreach in, oh, I'd say a good twenty years. You see, Eleonora Hammy took hold of my job when I didn't bring enough boxes. There was an unusual shortage of cardboard that year. (Us girls called it the cardboard drought.) She had always had her eye on it. You see, she had to mix up paste. So when I didn't do as well, she got our director to have us switch jobs. A rotten thing to do it was—well, never mind, why spoil your view of Miss Eleonora? I had nearly forgotten all about it until you brought it up. It's been so long. Things like that I don't let bother me. I just forget it and dwell on happy thoughts and people, not the Envious Eleonoras there are in the world. But back to your question, no, Honey, I'm sorry, but I don't have any cardboard.

“Well, that's all right. Should I ask Miss Eleonora?”

“Oh, no, Honey, I wouldn't for anything go—I mean, well, you know, she probably doesn't have any. After all, she's supposed to give them to the church, not keep them, although I wouldn't at all put it past her. Check Old Harry Jakins. He's such a packrat, he might be able to help you out, but you'd have to see.

After an hour of asking around, Mary gave up in despair and burst into the kitchen. “Oh, Mother! I'm afraid we're having a cardboard drought.”

“A what?” Mother very confusedly began to laugh, then, seeing Mary's look of distress, she began to soothe her little bundle of nerves.

“There, there, now. Don't worry, my darling; something will come up.”

“But does the ‘something’ know that it has to come up tomorrow?” Mother smiled and smoothed her daughter's matted hair. She didn't know what to tell her daughter. Mrs. Sanders was herself afraid that her daughter might not be able to find any cardboard to carry out her endeavor. *Maybe we **are** suffering a cardboard drought*, the mother thought to herself, only this time she didn't laugh.

After a considerable length of silence, Mother Sanders spoke again. “I'll tell you what we'll do . First, let's give it up to God and not think anymore about it. And then you can help me prepare us a little trifle to eat.

“But... you mean... to not even... look anymore?”

“Why yes, Honey, that is what I meant.”

“But that doesn't seem very responsible.”

“What do you mean, my dear?”

“Well... what if I don't find any?”

“Well, that's just it. You already looked everywhere you could think of, and God knows where every single piece of cardboard there is. I believe if He wants you to have some, He will send some right to you.”





“I suppose so.”

“Come. Help me fix up a little tea, and then you need to be running on to Mrs. Horn’s; she said she had a little job for you to do.”

“Oh, Mother, do I have to?”

“I’m afraid so, Dear.”

“I can’t stand going there to help her.”

“I know. But what about her makes it so dreadful?”

“Oh, well... she’s so old and frightening-looking, and she doesn’t seem to appreciate anything I do for her. She’s always telling me how wrongly or slowly I’m doing the job. I just don’t like her.

“I’m sorry, Dear, but like you said, she’s old and she doesn’t have any family—she’s probably very lonely. I think she must like you more than you think, or she wouldn’t keep having you help her.”

“I don’t think she will ever ask me to stop helping her.” Mother smiled and continued,

“Remember, Mary, even though Mrs. Horn doesn’t seem to notice your work, God does, and will bless you for those deeds that are done with a good and right heart. Run along now. I’ll take care of supper myself.”

In obedience to her mother, little Mary plodded over to Mrs. Horn’s house or Gloomy Horn’s as she called it. She walked up and knocked on the door. She waited and waited. She heard a loud crash from what sounded like the basement. And then a whole lot of grumbling and complaining from Mrs. Horn. Mary knocked even louder so as to be heard. She was heard by more grumbling and complaining only this time quite a bit louder until it answered the door.

“Oh, you!” Mrs. Horn said in one of her most disagreeable voices she had used that day. “What do you want?” Mary was terribly tempted to say, “oh, nothing... just saying hello.” And then run for her house as fast as she could. But she knew she couldn’t; so she stood her ground and reminded Mrs. Horn that she had come to help her. “Come inside.” Mary meekly followed. “Now you’re gonna dust all them glass dishes for me. But mind me when I say you better be careful cause if you break one, I’ll be expecting you or your ma to pay for it.”

“Yes, Ma’am.” Mary carefully, slowly worked along until Mrs. Horn once again stopped her.

“Now don’t be so careful that you move with less speed than a snail.” Such comments as, “Faster!” “Come on. I can’t be kept waiting,” or “Slow down! Didn’t your mother ever teach you to be careful?” Mary received the entire time. Mrs. Horn made Mary so upset that she wanted to throw each glass dish on the floor. But she wisely kept her mouth shut and tried with

not very much enthusiasm to filter her thoughts as well.

Twenty minutes had passed, and poor Mary's arms began to feel quite weak. Mrs. Horn came from the basement and called out to Mary, "You done with them dishes yet?"

"No, ma'am."

"Well, once you finish, you can help me carry up some trash from the basement, or you can just go on home." Mary was shocked—never before had Mrs. Horn given her a choice whether to help or not. She desperately wanted to say that she felt she had helped enough in this squalid place, and that she needed to be on her way. But Mother's words from earlier quickly entered her mind: *Even though Mrs. Horn doesn't seem to appreciate your work, God sees it and will bless you for those deeds that are done with a good and right heart.* Mary's heart began to soften. *I suppose the dishes I wiped weren't really done with a "good and right heart" as Mother says,* Mary told herself, *So if I'm hoping for God's blessing, I'd better help old Grumpy Horn in the basement.* It would take some humility to offer Mrs. Horn her help, but Mary was not so easily daunted.

"I can help with the basement trash." Mary's voice was sweet and faltering. With hands behind her back, she waited silently for Mrs. Horn to reply.

"What are you waiting for? Don't you want to get home? Get down there!" Mrs. Horn growled. Mary felt quite crushed to say the least. Millions of mean, wrong thoughts entered her mind as she tiptoed down stairs. But then Mary quickly remembered,

"Oh, I mustn't spoil my blessing!" And she pushed the thoughts from her mind.

Trying to distinguish a pile of trash from all the other "trash" in the dingy basement, Mary carefully scanned the basement. Finding what she believed to be the pile of trash, Mary scooped it up when a piece of cardboard escaped from her hands and softly fluttered to the ground. "Oh, bother!" Mary said as she tried to pick it back up without losing the other trash. Suddenly she realized what she was picking up. Mary gave a squeal of delight and dropped all else and came running up the stairs with the piece of cardboard wrapped tightly in her arms. "Mrs. Horn, please. May I?" Mary burst out before she had even reached the top.


"What's all this? Slow down; you're talking faster than fifty stampeding cattle." Mrs. Horn complained.

"Please, Mrs. Horn, please!" Mary loosened her grasp just enough for Mrs. Horn to make out what it was.

"Why, if it was in the trash, I don't know why not." Then noticing her kind tone, Mrs. Horn quickly added in a sterner one, "As long as you pick up the rest of the trash pile and don't leave me to break my back over it; then, yes, you can take it from me."

"Oh, Mrs. H—" Mary's voice broke in tears, and she leaned over and kissed Mrs. Horn on the cheek. Never before had Mary even felt the slightest inclination to hug Mrs. Horn, but now, feeling words inadequate, Mary felt impelled to kiss her as if she were her own





grandmother. Mrs. Horn didn't know how to respond to this act of love. She hadn't received such kindness in so long.

"Oh, never mind." Mrs. Horn said, wiping her cheeks. And then, in the sweetest of tones, "You just do a good job on the pile of trash. Okay, Honey?"

"Yes, Ma'am!" Mary agreed as she ran to her task.

After the trash had been cleaned, Mary offered to help with more jobs with Mrs. Horn, who graciously accepted. Mrs. Horn found it much easier to be kind and encouraging when she dealt with joyful help, just as Mary found it easier to help when Mrs. Horn was more friendly and kind. (Of course, the cardboard helped too!)

"Nearly thirty minutes passed before Mary found herself walking home. She had been happy to stay longer, but Mrs. Horn insisted that she get home to supper. It didn't take much insisting, and Mary ran for home with her "answer to prayer" wrapped up in newspaper and held tightly to her chest.

The half-mile walk had never seemed so long, nor been so short, as Mary at last reached her house. Mary burst through the front door with her increasingly common greeting. "Oh, Mother, Mother!"

"What is it now? Mother Sanders asked as she turned to face her daughter. "Oh, Mary! Mary!" Mother exclaimed as she saw the cardboard in her hands.

Mary related all the happenings of the finding and ended with, "I'm glad I took your advice."

"I am too, Sweetie, and just think, God has already blessed you for it."

"Oh, I'm so happy!" Mary exclaimed as she began to tear up in joy. Mother Sanders smiled and silently thanked God for Mary's joy of giving. Mary continued, "It's the perfect size, width, color, and everything."

"Go get a pair of scissors, and I'll finish supper while you make your nativity. Does that sound good?" Mother Sanders didn't even receive an answer before Mary was gone in search of her needed tool. Mother Sanders laughed until she cried and went into the kitchen.

The next half hour found Mary diligently bent over her work and Mother Sanders flying back and forth from the kitchen to Mary. At last, with Mother Sanders' assistance, the manger, cross, and tomb had been created. Mary was so captivated with bliss that she remained much more solemn and silent than before. But Mother Sanders knew that deep inside her little Mary's heart, her greatest wish had been satisfied.

That night, Mary knelt by her bed and said a prayer to God, "Dear Jesus, thank you so much for blessing me this day. Please bless the child who receives this poor, humble gift from Your daughter. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Mother Sanders came in to kiss Mary goodnight. As she did, Mary spoke, “Oh, mother, isn’t He so good to give us the gift-giving of Christmas!”

“Yes, Mary, He is.” With joy in her heart, a smile on her lips, and a hand on her nativity, Mary fell fast asleep.

THE END

