



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

A Christmas Star

Katharine 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 used to call all the little stars around her and tell them a story. It was always the same story, but the stars never wearied 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 men'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 some one'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 to-night 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.

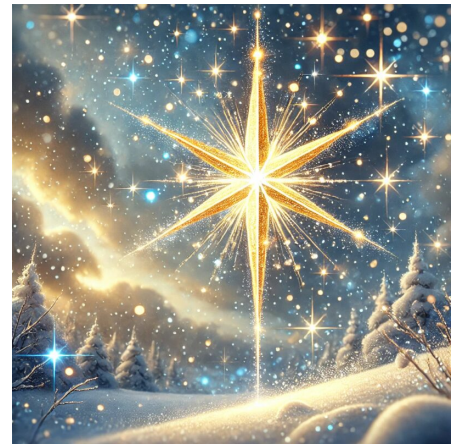
Rising, she took the little star by the hand and led it to a door that it had never seen before. The Mother Moon opened the door, and there was a long dark entry; at the far end was shining a little speck of light.

"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, almost sadly, 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 blue and red and silver. It itself was gold. The shop smelled of evergreen, and was full of Christmas shoppers, men and women and children; but of them all, the star looked at no one but a little boy standing in front of the counter; for as soon as the star saw the child it knew that he was the one to whom it belonged.

The little boy was standing beside a sweet-faced woman in a long black veil and he was not looking at anything in particular. The star shook and trembled on the string that held it, because it was afraid lest the child would not see it, or lest, if he did, he would not know it as his star.

The lady had a number of toys on the counter before her, and she was saying: "Now I think we have presents for every one: 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.

"Oh, mother, just see that star up there! I wish—oh, I do wish I had it."

"Oh, my dear, 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 afternoon before Christmas, when the tree was being decorated, that the golden star was unwrapped and taken out from the paper.

"Here is something else," 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 some one else 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 candles were lighted on the Christmas-tree, and there were so many that they fairly dazzled the eyes; and the gold and silver balls, the fairies and the glass fruits, 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 came trooping 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 children.

How different it all was from the great wide, still sky house! But the star had never been so happy in all its life; for the little boy was there.

He stood apart from the other children, looking up at the star, with his hands clasped behind him, and he did not seem to care for the toys and the games.

At last it was all over. The lights were put out, the children went home, and the house grew still. Then the ornaments on the tree began to talk among themselves.

"So that is all over," said a silver ball. "It was very gay this evening—the gayest Christmas I remember."

"Yes," said a glass bunch of grapes; "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 paper fairy. "Really it seems hardly worth while. Such a few days out of the year and then to be shut up in the dark box again. I almost wish I were a paper doll."

The bunch of grapes was wrong in saying that people would come to look at the Christmas-tree the next few days, for it stood neglected in the library and nobody came near it. Everybody in the house went about very quietly, with anxious faces; for the little boy was ill.

At last, one evening, a woman came into the room with a servant. The woman wore the cap and apron of a nurse.

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

The sweet-faced lady was sitting by the bed, and as the nurse came in she held out her 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; and 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 piece of paper that had been the star lay on a table beside the bed, its five points very sharp and bright. But it was not the 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, and it had gone out with him into a new and more beautiful sky country than it had ever known before—the sky country where the little child angels live, each one carrying in its heart its own particular star.

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