



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Joe's Search for Santa Claus

Irving Bacheller

A story, my child? Well, there's none that I know
As good as the story about little Joe.
He lived with his mother, just under the eaves
Of a tenement high, where the telegraph weaves
Its highway of wire, that everywhere goes,
And makes the night musical when the wind blows.

Their home had no father — the two were bereft
Of all but their appetites — those never left!
Joe's grew with his thought; a day never passed
He spent not in hunger to make the food last;
And days when his mother silently went
And stood by the windows — Joe knew what it meant.
They'd nothing for supper! The words were so sad
That somehow they drowned all the hunger he had.
And surely God's miracles never have ceased —
Joe's hunger grew less when his sorrows increased.
When the coal ran out in winter's worst storm,
The fire burnt the harder that kept their hearts warm.

Their windows revealed many wonderful sights,
Long acres of roofing and high-flying kites;
At sunset, the great vault of heaven aglow,
The lining of gold on the clouds hanging low,
The cross on the top of St. Mary's high tower
Ablaze with the light of that magical hour;
And still, as the arrows of light slanted higher,
The last thing in sight was the great cross of fire.
Each day, as it vanished, the history old
Of Christ's crucifixion was reverently told;
To Him the boy learned to confide all his woes,
But oftenest prayed for a new suit of clothes,
Since those that he wore didn't fit him at all —
The coat was too large and the trousers too small,
And Joe looked so queer, from his head to his feet,
It grieved his proud soul to be seen in the street.

And sometimes he cherished a secret desire
To own a hand-sled, or to build a bonfire;
But reached one conclusion by various routes —
He could have better fun with a new pair of boots.
He thought how the old pair, when shiny and whole,
Had squeaked in a way that delighted his soul,
And remembrance grew sad as he strutted around
And tried hard, but vainly, to waken that sound.

The day before Christmas brought trouble for Joe,
A thousand times worse. 'Twas a terrible blow
To hear that old Santa Claus, god of his dreams,
Would not come that year with his fleet-footed teams.
He'd seen them. Why, once, of a night's witching hour
He saw them jump over the cross on the tower
And scamper away o'er the snow-covered roofs,
His heart beating time to the sound of their hoofs.
Not coming this year? Santa Claus must be dead,
He thought, as with sad tears he crept into bed.

And, as he lay thinking, the long strings of wire
Sang low in the wind like a deep-sounding lyre,
And Joe caught the notes of this solemn refrain —
"He'll not come again! no, he'll not come again!"
And oh! how the depths of his spirit were stirred
By thoughts that were born of the music he heard!
How cold were the winds, and they sang in their strife,
Of storms yet to come in the winters of life.
They mocked him, but mark how the faith of the child
Stood firm as a fortress, its hope undefiled;
For still the boy thought that, if Santa Claus knew
How great were their needs and their comforts how few,
He would come; and at length, when the first rays of light
Had fathomed the infinite depths of the night,
And brightened the windows, Joe cautiously crept
Out of bed: and he dressed while his mother still slept,
And down the long stairways on tiptoe he ran;
Then out in the snow, with the will of a man,
He went, looking hither and thither, because,
Poor boy! he was trying to find Santa Claus.

He hurried along through the snow-burdened street
As if the good angels were guiding his feet;
And as the sun rose in the heavens apace,

A radiance fell on his uplifted face
That came from the cross gleaming far overhead —
A symbol of hope for the living and dead.
A moment he looked at the great house of prayer,
Then slyly peeked in to see what was there;
And entering softly he wandered at will
Through pathways of velvet, deserted and still,
And saw the light grow on a wonderful scene
Of ivy-twined columns and arches of green,
And back of the rail, where the clergyman knelt,
He sat on the cushions to see how they felt.
How soft was that velvet he stroked with his hand!
But when he lay down, oh, the feeling was grand!
And while he was musing the walls seemed to sway,
And slowly the windows went moving away.



What, ho! there he comes! with his big pack and all,
Down the sunbeams that slope from the high-windowed wall,
And Joe tried to speak, but could not, if he died,
When Santa Claus came and sat down by his side.
"A tenement boy! humph! he probably swears."
(Joe trembled, and tried hard to think of his prayers.)
He lifted Joe's eyelids, he patted his brow,
And said, "He is not a bad boy, anyhow."

But hark! there is music; a deep-swelling sound
Is sweeping on high as if heavenward bound.
And suddenly waking, Joe saw kneeling there
The rector, long-robed, who was reading a prayer.
"Provide for the fatherless children," said he,

"The widowed, the helpless, the bond and the free."

The rector stops praying — his face wears a frown;

A ragged young gamin is pulling his gown.

"I knowed you would come," said the boy, half in fright —

"I knowed you would come — I was watchin' all night.

Say! what are ye goin' t'give mother an' me?

Le'me see what 'tis, Santa Claus — please le'me see!"

The rector looked down into Joe's honest face,

And a great wave of feeling swept over the place;

And tenderly laying his hand on Joe's head,

He turned to the people and solemnly said:

"We pray that the poor may be sheltered and fed,

And we leave it to Heaven to furnish the bread.

Ye know, while He feedeth the fowls in the air,

The children of mankind He leaves to man's care;"

And kissing Joe's face the preacher said then:

"Of such is the kingdom of Heaven. Amen!"

That day Santa Claus came to many a door

He'd forgotten to call at the evening before.

Was little Joe lucky? Well, now, you are right.

And the wires sang merrily all the next night.

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