



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

They Got the Turkey

Margaret Winship Eytinge

The shop of Mr. Onosander Golong looked, that 24th of December, like a bower. Two young cedar-trees stood one on each side of the doorway; long garlands of evergreen, sprinkled with bright berries, were festooned all over the walls; and every turkey there, and there were lots of them, hanging like some new kind of gigantic fruit from the mass of green that covered the ceiling, had a gay ribbon tied around its neck. And such a wonderful picture in the way of freshness and color as the big window presented to the passers-by! Bunches of crisp light green celery leaning up against heaps of brown, pink-eyed potatoes and honest red onions; fiery-looking peppers side by side with golden oranges and yellow lemons; hard, smooth, shining cranberries trying to look as though they were sweet; great fat pumpkins; piles of green and piles of rosy apples; bunches of fragrant thyme; and more turkeys, some with and some without their feathered coats, but all, as I said before, with gay ribbons around their necks. Dear me! if Santa Claus could have only looked into that window and peeped into that shop, how pleased he would have been, and how he would have laughed! And he certainly would have taken Mr. Onosander Golong for a long-lost brother, for never before did mortal man so strongly resemble the children's old Christmas friend. Snow-white hair, long snow-white beard, twinkling blue eyes, round, fat, red, good-natured face, a fur cap on his head, bunches of holly berries pinned here and there on his shaggy jacket, and a laugh—good gracious! such a loud, hearty, mirth-provoking laugh, that the very people on the street, hearing it, began to smile, and feel that Christmas was here indeed. And I tell you Mr. Onosander Golong was busy that day, and so were all the men and boys employed by him. Turkeys and other things that had been ordered the evening before, turkeys and other things that had been ordered early that morning, and turkeys and other things being ordered all the time, were to be packed away in huge baskets, and sent to their respective destinations. But he wasn't so busy but that he stopped a moment from his work to give a piece of meat to a poor dog that had trotted hopefully into the shop (having evidently translated the name "Golong" over the door into "Come in"), and was asking for it with his eyes. And as he rose from patting the dog, he saw two children standing before him, also asking for something with their eyes. They were poorly dressed children, but the girl had a sweet, bright face, and the boy was as jolly-looking a little fellow as you could find anywhere. His cheeks were as round, if not as red, as Mr. Golong's, and his merry black eyes actually danced in his head. Now if

there was one place in Mr. Onosander Golong's heart softer than the rest, it was the place he kept for children; and so when he saw these two looking up in his face—the boy with boyish boldness, and the girl with girlish shyness—he said, in the cheeriest, kindest manner, "Well, small people, what can I do for you?"

"We would like to tell you a story," answered the boy, in a frank, pleasant voice.

"Tell me a story!" repeated Mr. Golong, in a tone of great surprise.

"Yes, sir, please—a Christmas story," was the reply.

"Bless my heart! what a queer idea!" said Mr. Golong, and he laughed a silent laugh that half closed his eyes and wrinkled his nose in the funniest way.

"Wouldn't you like to hear one?" asked the girl, coaxingly.

"Of course I would—I'm very fond of stories—but I don't see how I can spare the time. We're so busy just now, and likely to be until night," said Mr. Golong.

"It's only a short one," said the boy.

"A very short one," added the girl.

"Well, go ahead," said the good-natured old fellow. And he sat down on a barrel of potatoes, and his young visitors placed themselves one on each side of him.

"One Christmas-time," the boy began, "there was a big tenement-house in this city, and ten families lived in it, and every one of these families 'cept one knew they were a-going to have turkey for their Christmas dinner. They knew it sure the day before Christmas, all 'cept this one. The family that wasn't sure the day before Christmas morning lived on the top floor, and it was—it was—"

"Mrs. Todd, Neal Todd, Hetty Todd, and Puppy Todd," prompted the girl.

"Yes, it was them," said the boy, and went on with his story again: "Mrs. Todd was Neal's and Hetty's mother—they hadn't any father; he died three years ago—and Puppy was their dog. Mrs. Todd is one of the best mothers ever lived, and she sews button-holes on boys' jackets for a big store; and Hetty cleans up the house, and gets[Pg 69] the supper, and such things; and I—I mean Neal—runs errands for folks when he can get a chance after school. His mother wants him to go to school till he's fourteen anyhow, 'cause a boy that has some education can get along better than a boy that don't know anything. And this family, though they were very poor, had always managed to have a turkey



dinner till the Christmas I'm telling about, and Mrs. Todd she loved turkey."

"Didn't Hetty and Neal?" asked Mr. Golong, closing his eyes and wrinkling his nose again; and he hurried away to wait on a stout lady, all covered with glittering jet ornaments and bugles, who must have been a very particular customer, she talked so loud and so much.

"Didn't Hetty and Neal?" he repeated, when he came back.

"Oh, my! I guess they did!" said the girl, her eyes sparkling.

"They'd 'a been funny fellows if they didn't," added the boy; "but, 'pon their words and honors, they wanted it more for their mother—she's such a good mother, and has so few good things to eat—than they did for themselves. And it made them feel awful bad when she came home and cried 'cause some wicked thief had stolen her pocket-book with half a week's earnings in it, and the two-dollar bill that the boss had given her to buy a Christmas dinner with besides. And so the boy Neal—he's kind of a nice chap, ain't he, Hetty?"

"Awful nice," replied Hetty, with a mischievous little giggle.

"And he says to his sister—she's awful nice, ain't she, Hetty?"

"Kind of nice," said Hetty, with another little giggle.

"He says to his sister," continued the boy, "'Don't say anything to mother, but put on your hat, and bring a basket, and we'll make a try for a merry Christmas dinner—turkey and all.' And they went round the corner to a beautiful market, kept by a gentleman who looked exactly like Santa Claus—"

Mr. Onosander Golong laughed aloud this time, and flew to wait on another particular customer.

"So he looked like Santa Claus?" he said, with a chuckle, when he sat down on the barrel of potatoes again.

"The very image of him!" said the girl, with great emphasis.

"The boy," began the boy once more, "had run errands for him two or three times, and each time had got two apples or oranges besides the reg'lar pay; and he was good to cats and dogs. So this chap went to this gentleman—he took his sister along, 'cause he thought Mr. Golong would like to see her—and they told him their story. And the boy says, when it was done, 'If you would only trust us for a turk—I mean, a turkey, and a few other things, I'll work for you all holiday week, and another week too, after school. My name's Neal Todd, and my mother is a real nice woman, and I love her just as you used to love your mother when you was a little boy.' And the gentleman, says he, 'Being as it's Christmas-time, and I look so much like Santa Claus, I'll do it.' And he did. And that's all."

Mr. Onosander Golong burst out a-laughing, and oh! how he laughed! He laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks. He laughed until he nearly fell off the barrel. He laughed until everybody far and near who heard him laughed too, and the very roosters in the poultry shop over the way joined in, and crowed with all their might and main. And they got the turkey.

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