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Christmas Gifts

Laura E. Richards

"Mother," said Jack, "may I have some money to buy Christmas presents with?"

"Dear," said his mother, "I have no money. We are very poor, and I can hardly buy enough food for us all."

Jack hung his head. If he hadn't been ten, the tears would have come to his eyes — but he was ten.

"All the other boys give presents!" he said.

"So shall you!" said his mother. "All presents are not bought with money. The best boy who ever lived was as poor as we are, and yet He was always giving."

"Who was He?" asked Jack. "And what did He give?"

"This is His birthday," said his mother. "He was the good Jesus. He was born in a stable, and He lived in a poor working-man's house. He never had a penny of His own, yet He gave twelve good gifts every day. Would you like to try His way?"

"Yes!" cried Jack.

So his mother told him this and that, and soon Jack started out, dressed in his best suit, to give his presents.

First, he went to Aunt Jane's house. She was old and lame, and she did not like boys.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Merry Christmas!" said Jack. "May I stay for an hour and help you?"

"Humph!" said Aunt Jane. "Want to keep you out of mischief, do they? Well, you may bring in some wood."

"Shall I split some kindling, too?" asked Jack.

"If you know how," said Aunt Jane. "I can't have you cutting your foot and messing my clean shed all up."

Jack found some fresh pine wood and a bright hatchet, and he split up a great pile of kindling and thought it fun. He stacked it neatly, then brought in a pail of fresh water and filled the kettle.

"What else can I do?" he asked. "There are twenty minutes more."

"Humph!" said Aunt Jane. "You might feed the pig."



Jack fed the pig, who thanked him in his own way.

"Ten minutes more!" he said. "What shall I do now?"

"Humph!" said Aunt Jane. "You may sit down and tell me why you came."

"It is a Christmas present!" said Jack. "I am giving hours for presents. I had twelve, but I gave one to mother, and another one was gone before I knew I had it. This hour was your present."

"Humph!" said Aunt Jane. She hobbled to the cupboard and took out a small round pie that smelled very good. "Here!" she said. "This is your present, and I thank you for mine. Come again, will you?"

"Indeed I will," said Jack, "and thank you for the pie!"

Next, Jack went and read for an hour to old Mr. Green, who was blind. He read a book about the sea, and they both liked it very much, so the hour went quickly. Then it was time to help mother get dinner, and then time to eat it. That took two hours, and Aunt Jane's pie was wonderful. Then Jack took the Smith baby for a ride in its carriage — Mrs. Smith was ill — and they met its grandfather, who filled Jack's pockets with candy and popcorn and invited him to a Christmas tree that night.

Next, Jack went to see Willy Brown, who had been ill for a long time and could not leave his bed. Willy was very glad to see him. They played a game, and then each told the other a story, and before Jack knew it the clock struck six.

"Oh!" cried Jack. "You have had two!"

"Two what?" asked Willy.

"Two hours!" said Jack. And he told Willy about the presents he was giving. "I am glad I gave you two," he said, "and I would give you three, but I must go and help mother."

"Oh, dear!" said Willy. "I thank you very much, Jack. I have had a perfectly great

time — but I have nothing to give you."

Jack laughed. "Why, don't you see?" he cried. "You have given me just the same thing. I have had a great time, too."

"Mother," said Jack, as he was going to bed, "I have had a splendid Christmas. But I wish I had had something to give you besides the hours."

"My darling," said his mother, "you have given me the best gift of all — yourself!"

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