



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Going to Meet Christmas

Edmund Vance Cooke

"Papa," said the Man Mite, "can you hear Christmas?"

"Can you hear Christmas?" repeated his papa. "Why, I suppose so, in a sort of way. You can hear bells chiming and little boys drumming and little girls blowing horns and people laughing and everybody saying, 'Merry Christmas!' I suppose that's hearing Christmas, isn't it?"

"But I mean can you hear it before it's here?" asked the Man Mite.

"No, I think not," answered papa.

"Well, if you can't hear it, how can you tell it's coming? Can you see it coming?"

"Oh," answered his papa, "I see what you mean now. Well, how can you tell tomorrow is coming? Can you smell it?"

The Man Mite laughed. "Such a silly papa! Tomorrow has to come so that today can be yesterday. You 'splained that to me once yourself."

"Yes? Well, Christmas has to come so that next Christmas can be last Christmas."

"Oh, papa," cried the Man Mite, "you forgot about *this* Christmas — but please don't tell me when it's coming, because I want it to surprise me. I want it to sneak right up and get here when I don't know it."

"All right," laughed papa, "I shan't tell, and you can go to bed every night for a week hoping that the next day will be Christmas."

Which was exactly what the Man Mite did, and for a night or two it was very exciting. But toward the end of the week he began to grow tired of it. It was all very well to go to bed hoping that the next day would be Christmas, but to wake up every morning and ask, "Where is Christmas?" only to be answered with "Christmas is coming!" — that was very disappointing.

One night his papa and mamma insisted that he go to bed earlier than usual, so he was very wide awake for a while, lying there wondering how he could hurry Christmas along. He closed his eyes and tried to imagine how Christmas looked, dilly-dallying on the way — as he remembered with shame he himself did sometimes when he was sent on an errand, instead of hastening as Christmas

and a little boy both ought to do.

"Christmas is coming! Christmas is coming!" he repeated to himself. "And if it doesn't hurry and hurry up — if it doesn't hurry and hurry up, I'll go to meet it!"

That was a new idea, and the Man Mite lingered on it lovingly. Go to meet it! Why not?

Just how he got himself dressed and out of the house he never quite remembered afterward. He said he was in such a hurry he didn't have time to remember — though that doesn't sound quite reasonable, does it?

He does remember running for a long time as fast as he could go. When he stopped to catch his breath and look around, he found he was in a strange part of the city, and there was nobody in the street in any direction. He was lost.

The Man Mite remembered that his papa had told him if he was ever lost, he should ask a policeman — but there wasn't a policeman or anybody else in sight. On the corner, though, was a police call box, and the Man Mite had seen officers telephone the station from one before, so he thought he would try the same thing. As he was feeling for the door, a voice inside exclaimed, "Christmas is coming!"

"Which way is it coming, please?" asked the Man Mite — and off popped the top and up popped a Jack-in-the-box with his arms spread wide, pointing the direction.

"Thank you," said the Man Mite, and hurried off the way the Jack-in-the-box had shown. Presently he spotted a toy trolley car trundling along in the same direction. "Hello!" he called. "Where is that car going?"

"Going to meet Christmas," answered the trolley car. "Get inside."

"Thank you," answered the Man Mite, "you're almost too small for me to get inside — but I can sit on top."

He did, and the car carried him to the end of the line. He was his own conductor and collected his own fare from himself. When the car stopped, it was at the end of a street that ran straight into a steep bluff with no lift or path to help a little boy to the top. The Man Mite was wondering how he would ever get past, when he noticed a climbing monkey on a string, one end of which was tied to the top of the bluff and the other to the ground below.

"Hello," said the monkey. "Christmas is coming, and if you want to go meet it, you'd better crawl up my string. I'll show you how."

"Oh, I can't," said the Man Mite.

"Can't!" mocked the monkey. "I'm only a tin monkey and I can do it. It's easy."

He went up hand over hand and foot over foot, and the Man Mite followed. Much to his surprise, he reached the top without any difficulty. There he found a toy train of cars, a toy automobile, and a wooden wagon with *Express* painted on both sides.

"All aboard for the Christmas Limited!" called the little iron brakeman.

"Automobile Air-Line to Santaclausville!" announced the tin chauffeur.

"Fast express going to meet Christmas!" cried the tongue of the wagon.

The Man Mite would have liked to ride the train or the auto, but there was so much more room in the wooden wagon that he climbed in — and was surprised to find it quickly left its companions far behind. It sped along merrily, and its tongue kept up a continuous cheerful chatter, until they reached the ocean, where a toy boat was floating.

"All aboard for Christmas!" called the captain.

"But your boat is too small," answered the Man Mite, "and besides, there's not a board in it — it's tin."

"Well, throw us a line and we'll tow you," said the captain.

As the Man Mite had no rope, he let the captain take hold of the wagon's tongue instead. The captain stood at the stern and hung on.



Though the boat was so small, it pulled the Man Mite through the water in a surprising manner. The wooden wagon floated and kept the Man Mite dry — but not a word could he get out of it, which was quite a contrast to its manner on land.

The weather grew colder and colder. Presently the boat was stuck fast in the ice. The wagon was frozen tight as well, and the captain let go of the "line."

"There!" cried the wagon angrily. "I knew what you'd bring us into."

"Well, why didn't you say so, if you knew so much?" said the captain.

"Say so! Could you say so if somebody was pulling you along by the tongue?" demanded the wagon.

The captain replied and the wagon retorted, and the quarrel was becoming very unpleasant — when along came a pair of skates without anybody on them.

"Boat ahoy! Wagon ahoy! Boy ahoy!" cried the skates. "Christmas is coming!"

"Take me along to meet it, please?" asked the Man Mite, and in another moment he was on the skates and gliding faster and more easily than he had ever skated in his life. He skated for a long time, passing fields where plum puddings were growing like pumpkins, trees where candy boys hung like pears, and snowdrifts which on closer inspection proved to be enormous frosted cakes. Curiously enough, the fields and trees and drifts were all moving too, crying out, "We're going to meet Christmas!"

After what seemed a very long time, much to his surprise and joy, he met a boy who appeared to be about his own age. The Man Mite was almost sure he'd seen his face somewhere before — and yet, the more he looked, the surer he was he hadn't, because he had certainly never seen a boy with a fur cap, fur coat, fur boots, and fur trousers. He noticed too that while the boy's face was round and rosy, his hair was white — not just pale blond, but pure, snowy white.

"Hello!" said the stranger. "What's your name?"

"They call me Man Mite. What's yours?"

"Santy."

"Santy? What a funny name. Santy what?"

"Santy Claus."

"Santy Claus?" cried the Man Mite. "You can't be Santy Claus. He's a man, and you're just a little boy like me."

"Ho! You're thinking of my father," answered the boy.

"Your *father*!" cried the Man Mite, more astonished than ever. It had somehow never occurred to him that Santa Claus might be somebody's father.

"Have you got a mother, too?" he asked after a moment.

"Yep. Had one ever since I was born. Haven't you?"

"Of course," answered the Man Mite, "but I never heard of Mrs. Santa Claus."

"Never heard of your mother neither," answered Santy Jr.

"Now, you're not fooling me? Are you honestly Santa Claus's little boy?"

"Think about it," answered the other. "Doesn't your father remember having a Santa Claus when he was little?"

"Yes."

"Didn't your father's father have a Santa Claus?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, do you suppose it's the same Santa Claus every time? Somebody's got to keep the business going."

"And will you be Santa Claus — the real Santa Claus — when you grow up?" asked the Man Mite.

"Oh, I suppose so," said the other, carelessly.

"You *suppose so*! Don't you want to be?"

"Naw. I want to be the conductor on a dog-sled train. They made the run this year in three months and two days. Wasn't that flying?"

It didn't seem particularly fast to the Man Mite. "How far is it?"

"From Arctic C. to Aurora B."

"What do you mean by Arctic C. and Aurora B.?"

"Arctic Circle to Aurora Borealis, of course. That run was an excursion, too. We always go to the Aurora for the Fourth of July. Splendid fireworks up there."

"The Fourth? Do you celebrate the Fourth?"

"Of course."

"But you're not Americans, are you?"

"No — that's the worst of it. We've got to celebrate everything: holidays and saints' days and kings' and queens' birthdays, the whole lot. That's because we belong to all nations."

"Christmas is the best one, isn't it?" smiled the Man Mite.

"Worst of the lot," said Santy Jr. shortly.

"Why, whatever makes you think so?" cried the Man Mite.

"Because Dad's always away on Christmas, and we've cleared everything out of the house to the last ginger snap to put in folks' stockings, and it's the middle of the night, and everybody's tired — just like I am now — and wants to go to bed."

"Middle of the night? What do you mean?"

"Middle of the north-pole night. If it weren't for Christmas, we could go to bed around the end of October and sleep until early May. But Ma thinks we ought to help Pa and wait up till he comes home. My, but I'm sleepy! Aren't you?"

"Yes," admitted the Man Mite, "a little."

"Well, come sleep with me. Your mother won't mind. You can get up around April and get home early."

While they were talking, Santy Jr. was leading the way into the house and up to his room. The two boys lay down together on a bed of bearskins, and the Man Mite said sleepily: "Will you tell me one thing?"

"Sure," said Santy.

"What makes your hair white?"

"What makes a polar bear's hair white? What makes an arctic fox's hair white? What makes an arctic hare's hair white? Why — hello! There's Dad coming back!"

"Coming back from where?"

"Why, from Christmas, of course. You do ask the funniest questions. I think you're asleep. Your eyes are shut and you sound half-gone already."

The Man Mite rubbed his eyes with both hands and tried to open them. Then he heard a voice cry, "Papa! Papa!" — but instead of Santy Jr.'s voice, it was the voice of his little brother Ben. Then someone kissed him and called, "Merry Christmas!"

"Oh, Papa," said the Man Mite as his eyes came open, "is it this Christmas or next Christmas?"

He didn't stop for an answer. With a shout of joy he sprang out of bed and flung himself upon a pair of skates, a toy steamboat, a wooden wagon with *Express* painted on both sides, and a toy trolley car just big enough for a boy to sit on the roof.

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why [ririro.com](https://www.ririro.com) offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share

[ririro.com](https://www.ririro.com) and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: [@ririro_reading](https://www.instagram.com/ririro_reading) · Pinterest: [pinterest.com/ririrocom](https://www.pinterest.com/ririrocom)