



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Winter's Herald

Jane Andrews

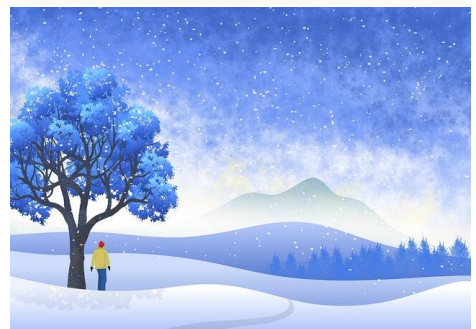
In the days of chivalry, mail-clad knights, armed with shield and spear, rode through the land to defend the right and to punish the wrong. Whenever they were to meet each other in battle at the great tournaments, a herald was first sent to announce the fight and give fair warning to the opponents, that each might be in all things prepared to meet the other, and defend or attack wisely and upon his guard.

So, dear children, you must know that Winter, who is coming clad in his icy armour, with his spear, the keen sleet, sends before him a herald, that we may not be all unprepared for his approach.

It is an autumn night when this herald comes; all the warm September noons have slipped away, and the red October sunsets are almost gone; still, the afternoon light, shining through the two maples, casts a crimson and yellow glow on the white wall of my little room, and on the paths is a delicate carpet of spotted leaves over the brown groundwork.

It is past midnight when the herald is called; and although his knight is so fierce, loud, and blustering, he moves noiselessly forth and carries his warning to all the country round. Through the little birch wood he comes, and whispers a single word to the golden leaves that are hanging so slightly on the slender boughs; one little shiver goes through them, sends them fluttering all to the ground, and the next morning their brown, shriveled edges tell a sad story.

Through the birch wood, he hurries and on to the bank of the brook that runs through the long valley; for the muskrat, who has his home under the shelving bank, must hear the news and make haste to arrange his hole with winter comforts before the brook is frozen. While he crosses the meadow the field mouse and the mole hear his warning and lay their heads together to see what is best to be done. Indeed, the mole, who himself can scarcely see at all, is always of opinion that two heads are better than one in such cases.



Beyond the brook is Farmer Thompson's field of squashes. "I will not hurt you tonight," says the herald as he creeps among them; "only a little nip here and a bite there, that the farmer may see tomorrow morning that it is time to take you into the barn." The turnips stand only on the other side of the fence and cannot fail to know also that the herald has come.

But up in Lucy's flower garden are the heliotropes and fuchsias, tea roses and geraniums, delicate, sensitive things, who cannot bear a cold word, it must have been really quite terrible what he said there; for before sunrise, the beautiful plants hung black and withered and no care from their mistress, no smiles or kind words, could make them look up again. The ivy had borne it bravely, and only showed on his lower leaves, which lay among the grass, a frosty fringe, where the dew used to hang.

My two maples heard the summons and threw off their gay dresses, which withered and faded as they fell in heaps on the sidewalk. The next morning, children going to school scuffed ankle-deep among them and laughed with delight. And the maples bravely answered the herald: "Now let him come, your knight of the north wind and the storm and the sleet; we have dropped the gay leaves which he might have torn from us. Let him come; we have nothing to lose. His snows will only keep our roots the warmer, and his winds cannot blow away the tiny new buds which we cherish, thickly wrapped from the cold, to make new leaves in the spring." And the elm and the linden and horse-chestnut sent also a like brave answer back by the herald.

Over the whole village green went the whisperer, leaving behind him a white network upon the grass; and before the sun was up to tangle his beams in its meshes and pull it all to pieces, old widow Blake has seen it from her cottage window and said to herself: "Well, winter is coming; I must set up some warm socks for the boys today, and begin little Tommy's mittens before the week is out." And Farmer Thompson stands at his great barn door, while yet the eastern sky is red, and tells Jake and Ben that the squashes and pumpkins and turnips must all be housed in cellar and barn before night; for a frost like this is warning enough for any man to begin to prepare for winter.

Mr. Winslow, the gardener, is working all day with matting and straw, tying up and packing warmly his tender shrubs and trees; and the climbing rose that is trained against the west end of the piazza must be made safe from the cold winds that will soon be creeping round there.

What will your mother do when she sees the white message that the herald has left in his frosty writing all over the lawn? Will she put away the muslin frocks and little pink or blue calicoes and gingham, the straw hats, and Frank's white trousers and summer jackets, just as the trees threw aside their summer leaves?

Not quite like the trees; for your clothes can't be made new every spring out of little brown buds but must be put away in the great drawers and trunks of the clothes-press, to wait for you through the winter.

And see how your mother will bring out the woolen stockings, warm hoods and caps, mittens, cloaks, and plaided dresses; and try on and make over, that all things may be ready. For it is with such things as these that she arms her little boys and girls to meet the knight who is coming with the north wind and storm.

Old Margaret, who lives in the little brown house down at the corner, although she cannot read a word from a book, reads the herald's message as well as your mother can. But here are her five boys, barefooted and ragged, ever in summer clothes, and her husband lies back with a fever.

She can't send back so brave an answer as your mother does. But your mother, and Cousin George's mother, and Uncle James can help her to make a good, brave answer; for here is Frank's last winter's jacket, quite too small for him, just right for little Jim; and father's old overcoat will make warm little ones for two of the other boys. And here are stout new shoes and woolen socks, and comfortable bedclothes for the sick man. Margaret sends a brave answer now, although this morning she was half ready to cry when she saw the message that Winter had sent.

Look about you, children, when the herald comes, and see what answers the people are giving him; I have told you a few. You can tell me many, if you will, before another year goes by.

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