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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Christmas Dog

Mary Graham Bonner

Daddy settled into his chair and began.

"A little girl named Peggy wrote a letter to Santa Claus. This is what she said:

"Dear Santa Claus, I would like a rag doll, and a doll that says Mamma and Papa and can shut her eyes. I also want a book and a set of paints. And please, dear Santa, bring my mother and Daddy a doggie to guard the house. I want a doggie too, but Mother and Daddy want one so much — so we could all share one doggie.

"Your affectionate little friend, Peggy.

"P.S. Please give my love to your Reindeer, and a great deal of love for you, dear Santa Claus. Peggy.'

"She put her letter down by the fireplace. The next morning it was gone, because she had addressed it quite correctly to *Mr. Santa Claus, By the Fireplace*, and as he was always on the lookout for letters around Christmas time, he got it safely.

"Now, Santa Claus loves to get letters. His mail around Christmas is tremendous — but the more letters he gets, the more he chuckles to himself. 'Oh, this is splendid,' he says, as he opens letter after letter.

"Days went by. Peggy kept wondering what Santa would bring her. She thought often of the doggie, because her mother and Daddy would say so often: *It would be a great protection if only we had a dog. This house is rather far from the rest, and a dog is such a companionable animal — the children would love him.*

"Peggy didn't like to write to Santa again. But just before bedtime each night she would whisper up the chimney: 'Please, dear Santa Claus, don't forget the doggie — and the doll, and the paint box — and —' but by this time her mother had led her off to bed. If Peggy had been allowed to keep going, she would have talked to Santa Claus all night. And if she had stayed up talking and missing her sleep, she would have been too tired to enjoy Christmas Day when it came.

"At last it was Christmas Eve. Again Peggy called up the chimney. She put her stocking first on one side of the fireplace and then the other, not quite sure which spot was best. Beside her stocking hung four smaller ones for her little

sisters and brothers.

"Good night, Santa Claus! Merry Christmas! My love to the Reindeer!' she called for the last time. And the younger children called out too: 'Good night, Santa Claus — give our love to the Reindeer!'

"And off they all trotted to the land of dreams, which they had to pass through before Christmas morning would come.

"The next morning, bright and early, Peggy and her sisters and brothers were up looking at their stockings. Such goodies as they found! Peggy got her rag doll, and a doll who could close her eyes and say 'Mamma, Papa.' She got her set of paints and a fine book. Her sisters and brothers got the presents they'd asked for, and they had great fun over the oranges in their stockings — several of them were dusted with black soot that Santa had dropped coming down the chimney. They loved to think of how he had picked those very oranges out himself.

"But when the first excitement had passed, Peggy thought quietly to herself: *There is no doggie*. She reminded herself that Santa Claus was not supposed to bring everything a person asked for. So after brushing away a single tear, she began to laugh and play and say 'Merry Christmas' — over and over and over again — to her mother and Daddy and her sisters and brothers.

"And then, in a moment or two, they all thought they heard a whimper outside the front door.

"I'll go and see,' said Peggy, with a beating heart.

"She opened the door. And there stood a little white dog, shivering miserably in the cold, his eyes saying as plainly as eyes can: *I have no home*.

"Peggy held him close. 'I know Santa Claus sent you here,' she said. 'Merry Christmas, Doggie dear — and this is going to be your home.'"



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