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How Polly and Ned
Found Santa Claus

..... By
Anna Chapin Ray



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L.

For Florence and Ralph and Beth
and Burt this little story was first
written. To them I dedicate it
once more.

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St. J. R. June 11, 1907

How Polly and Ned Found Santa Claus

I.



ONCE upon a time, not so very long ago, in a cosy little house in The Country of The Everyday—not the middle of the country, but just on the borders of Fairy Land, across the Dream River—Polly and Ned sat in the firelight, talking about Santa Claus.

Mosey sat between them. Mosey was their little gray dog, all ears and paws and not any tail to speak of. Just now, he was looking up into Ned's eyes with his two great wishful brown ones, as if he too wanted to have a finger in the pie, and a tongue in the talk.



“I do wish I knew how to get word to him,” Polly said, clasping her hands in the lap of her blue checked apron. She usually wore white aprons in the afternoon; but, to-day, she had been naughty, so her mamma had made her put on her blue apron again, and now Polly’s feelings were hurt about it.

“Why not write to him?” Ned suggested. Ned was two years younger than Polly, and wore spectacles and a shirt waist. Polly used to envy him, because the spectacles had shiny gold frames, and because he didn’t have to wear blue aprons. For that reason, she used to snub him sometimes, for fear he would get too uppish.

“What an idea!” she said now, scornfully. “Only babies write to Santa Claus, Ned. When people are as old as you and I, they know it isn’t any use.”

But Ned was a true boy, and he wanted the reason.

“How do you know?” he demanded.

“Be - cause.”

“Well, 'cause what?”

“'Cause I wrote to him, last year, and it didn't do any good,” Polly confessed.

“You did? What'd you write?”

“I asked him for a pony and a baby brother, and I didn't get anything but a new sled and Rosa Theresa.”

“But you said you loved Rosa Theresa, just yesterday,” Ned observed, while he patted Mosey's head.



“She's well enough for a doll,” Polly said loftily; “but I wanted something alive. I'll tell you, Ned, we'll go ask the Brown Woman how to find Santa Claus. I must find him, this year, for there are dozens of things I want, and

Mamma said, to-day, that if I kept on being naughty, Santa Claus wouldn't come here at all."

"Maybe he'll come to see me," Ned suggested.

"Huh, you're as naughty as I am, every single bit, so there now! No; we'll go to the Brown Woman, this very night. She can tell us just what to do, Ned; and we'll have a visit from Santa Claus, after all."

Sure enough, that very night after their mamma had tucked them into bed, Polly and Ned started off to find the Brown Woman. She lived just across the Dream River, and little boats kept sailing back and forth from The Country of the Everyday to the gate of her back garden where flowers are always in blossom, even in the middle of the winter. Mosey wouldn't go too. He never was willing to cross the river with them; but he always stayed close beside



the bank, to be ready to waggle a welcome to them, when they came home again.

“To find Santa Claus?” the Brown Woman repeated, wrapping her cloak around her more tightly than ever, as



she stooped to look into the children's eyes. “I can tell you what to do. Tomorrow night, when everyone else is asleep, you must cross the Dream River again, go up the hill, and on and on until you come to the Happy Oak. You will know which it is, for the wind is always laughing while it slides through the branches. Under the tree you will find the wishing stones, round, brown stones with a narrow white band about them. Don't move the stones; don't even touch them. Instead of that, you

must each of you dig a hole close beside one of the stones, whisper into the hole all the things you wish Santa Claus to bring you, whisper them so low that no one else can hear you, and cover them up tight. Santa knows the wishing stones. Late at night, he will come and dig up the earth near them. Then, if he finds your wishes buried there, he will carry them off and bring you the things you have wished for. Only he must not be disturbed. Remember that; and remember, if you should meet anyone on the way home, you musn't stop to talk, or to waste a moment, for fear you might forget your way home, and be drowned in the Dream River."

"But all that takes too long," Polly said forlornly. "Christmas isn't but two days off, Brown Woman, and this is my only chance to find Santa Claus."

"He will probably go to your house, anyway," the Brown Woman said, shaking back her long, dark hair and stooping to look still more sharply into Polly's eyes.

Polly hung her head.

"I was naughty," she said in a low voice; "and mamma says Santa Claus doesn't come to naughty girls."



The Brown Woman suddenly straightened up, till she stood before them, tall and slender, with her brown eyes raised to the stars above her.

“Little Polly and little Ned,” she said slowly; “listen to me, for I know better than your mother has told you. Santa Claus comes to everybody, good and bad alike; but he has ever so many masks and he brings ever so many kinds of things in his pack, so that not everybody is able to know him when he comes. There is only one way to be sure of knowing him, my dear children; there is one magic word I can teach you. If you keep it always on your lips, you are sure to know old Santa

Claus and to find only good things in his pack."

"Please, ma'am, what is it?" Polly and Ned asked in the same breath.

She smiled down at them, and her smile seemed to have caught some of the brightness of the stars above her head.

"It is *Good Will Toward Men*," she said, and, turning, she walked away.

"But what does it mean, Brown Woman?" Polly cried after her.

The Brown Woman never paused in her walk.



"Say it over and over again till you know the words by heart; then you will find out what they mean. That is all I can teach you. My mother taught it to me," she answered, over her shoulder.

Then she vanished in the darkness.

II.



FOR the first time in his life, Mosey crossed the Dream River, the next night, with Polly and Ned. They had expected to leave him at home; but when they stepped into the little boat to cross the river, Mosey jumped in after them and curled himself up in Ned's arms. He pretended to go fast asleep; but he wasn't asleep a bit. That wasn't Mosey's way. One eye, the one towards Ned, was tight shut, and Mosey snored a little, now and then; but his other eye was wide open and both pointed ears were all a-tremble,



each time the children spoke. As soon as they reached the bank, he hopped out of the boat and trotted off into Fairy Land, with his ears pointing straight upward and his tail trying to



do the same thing, but it was so short it could only poke out just a little, little way.

Behind him, Ned and Polly walked hand in hand, stopping often to listen

and to look over their shoulders, for it was all very dark around them, and they were just the least bit afraid. As soon as they came to the Happy Oak, though, they forgot to be afraid any more, they were in such a hurry to find the wishing stones, and in such anxiety for fear they might happen to touch one of them. Above them, the great, gnarly branches of the oak tree stretched out ever so far on either hand, and clear up in the topmost twigs was a



thick clump of green leaves which had forgotten to fall. The wind laughed and whistled merrily as it went sliding through them, and the moon, which had just peeped out of a cloud, seemed to Ned to be laughing and winking down at him. This comforted him a little; for the moon never winks at naughty



boys, and he was beginning to be very anxious about his visit from Santa Claus.

He was still staring up at the tree above him and at the jolly round moon, when Polly pulled his hand.

“Look at Mosey,” she whispered.

Sure enough, right beside a round brown stone with a white stripe about it, Mosey’s paws were flying fast and flirting the loose earth away on this side and on that. Then he paused and snuffled out a few words, dog words that Ned and Polly couldn’t understand, gave another pat to the earth, then turned his back to the hole, sat down



on his haunches, with his tongue hanging far out of his mouth, and waited to see what the children would do.

“It’s his Christmas wish,” Ned said softly. “We must hang up his stocking, too, Polly.”

But Polly had dropped his hand.

“Here’s a stone for you, Ned,” she said excitedly; “and here’s one for me. Quick, quick, before anyone finds us and speaks to us!”



Only a few minutes later, they turned away and took the path to the river again. Mosey ran on ahead of them, till he was out of sight, far down the winding path. Suddenly the children heard him barking and yelping.

“It’s cats,” Ned said.

“It’s the Brown Woman,” Polly added.

“Come, Mosey!” Ned called.



“Hsh!” Polly cautioned him. “You know we musn’t speak to anybody, or we shall get lost here, and that would be dreadful, for then we couldn’t have any Christmas at all.”

“Couldn’t Santa Claus come here?” Ned asked anxiously.

“’Course, you goosie; but what good would it do us, when we haven’t any clean stockings to hang up?”

Just then a turn in the road brought them in sight of Mosey, who was dancing about an old man in the pathway, nipping at his legs, barking as if he would split his little throat, then pausing to survey his victim with laughing eyes that were even more insulting than his bark. It was a shabby old man with a smooth-shaven face and bright blue eyes. His old coat hung in rags about him, and he was resting on a

clumsy crutch, while before him lay a torn brown bag and a scattered pile of brown potatoes.

“It’s my Christmas dinner,” he said fretfully. “I dropped ’em, and now I can’t get down to pick ’em up. Go ’way, dog!” He struck at Mosey with his crutch.

Mosey dodged the blow. Then he took the end of the crutch in his teeth and worried it as he would have worried a cat. It was great fun for Mosey; but the man looked so tired and shabby that Polly forgave him a little for his crossness.

“What shall we do, Ned?” she whis-



pered. “We musn’t speak to him, or we shall lose our way.

“Maybe it’s Santa Claus, going to dig up our wishes,” Ned said hopefully.

“What was it the Brown Woman told us to say?”

They whispered and nodded for a moment. Then, together, with their eyes fixed on the man, they shouted,—

“*Good Will toward Men!*—Thumbs!”
And they pressed their thumbs tight together.

“Emerson!” Polly added.

Polly went to kindergarten.

“Isaac Watts!” Ned echoed.

Ned went to Sunday school.

Then they looked up at the man once more, half expecting to see him turned into Santa Claus. No; there he stood, just the same, shabby and cross and tired.

“’Tisn’t Santa Claus,” Ned said despondently. “Come, Mosey, let’s go home.”

“No,” Polly said suddenly. “Let’s pick up his dinner, first. We don’t



need to speak to him, you know; but it's too bad to have him lose his Christmas dinner."

"I've got some string," Ned said, plunging one hand into his pocket, for even dream clothes must have pockets when a boy wears them. "I'll mend his bag while you pick up."

Even Mosey caught the spirit and ran to and fro, bringing Polly the potatoes that had rolled farthest away. The old man stood waiting, frowning a little, but not fretting any more. But



when the children handed him the bag, smiling and putting their fingers on their lips to show that their silence was not a sulky silence, his blue eyes suddenly grew friendly, and he laid one wrinkled hand on each little head.

"A Merry Christmas to you!" he said in a deeper, fuller voice than they



had heard before. "And may an old man's gratitude help to fill your Christmas stockings!"

* * * * *

Just as the clock struck twelve, the next night, Polly sat up in her little bed and stared hard at the chimney. On the other side of the room, Ned sat up in bed, too, and Mosey, who had been snoring loudly a moment before, stuck up his ears to listen.

Down the chimney there came, not the Santa Claus they had hoped for, but a shabby old man in ragged clothes, leaning on a crutch and carrying a torn brown bag tied up with a string. In their disappointment the children could have cried. Then they drew in a sharp breath of surprise and delight. Out from the tattered bag came, one after

the other, dolls and books and candy, carpenter tools, drums and rocking horses taller than the table, and finally a brand new collar for Mosey, with a great pink bow tied on it. Never did



a bag hold so much before. Never were stockings so crammed with goodies. They overflowed on the mantel and the chairs and the floor until there was nothing left for Polly and Ned to wish for.

Then of a sudden, while they were watching him, the old man seemed to change before their very eyes. He grew shorter and more stout. Then he threw aside his crutch and his shabby coat, pulled off his mask and stepped forward to the little beds, the jolly fur-clad saint whom the children love so well.



“Listen,” he said slowly, and his voice was like a deep-toned bell, clear and ringing, yet soft withal. “Polly and Ned, you have learned your Christmas lesson; you have learned the words, and you have found out what they mean. You helped the shabby old man who had lost his Christmas dinner, even though you thought that, in doing it, you might lose your own Christmas wishes. That is why I have come to you to-night. A Merry Christmas to you, and good night! Next year we shall meet again.”

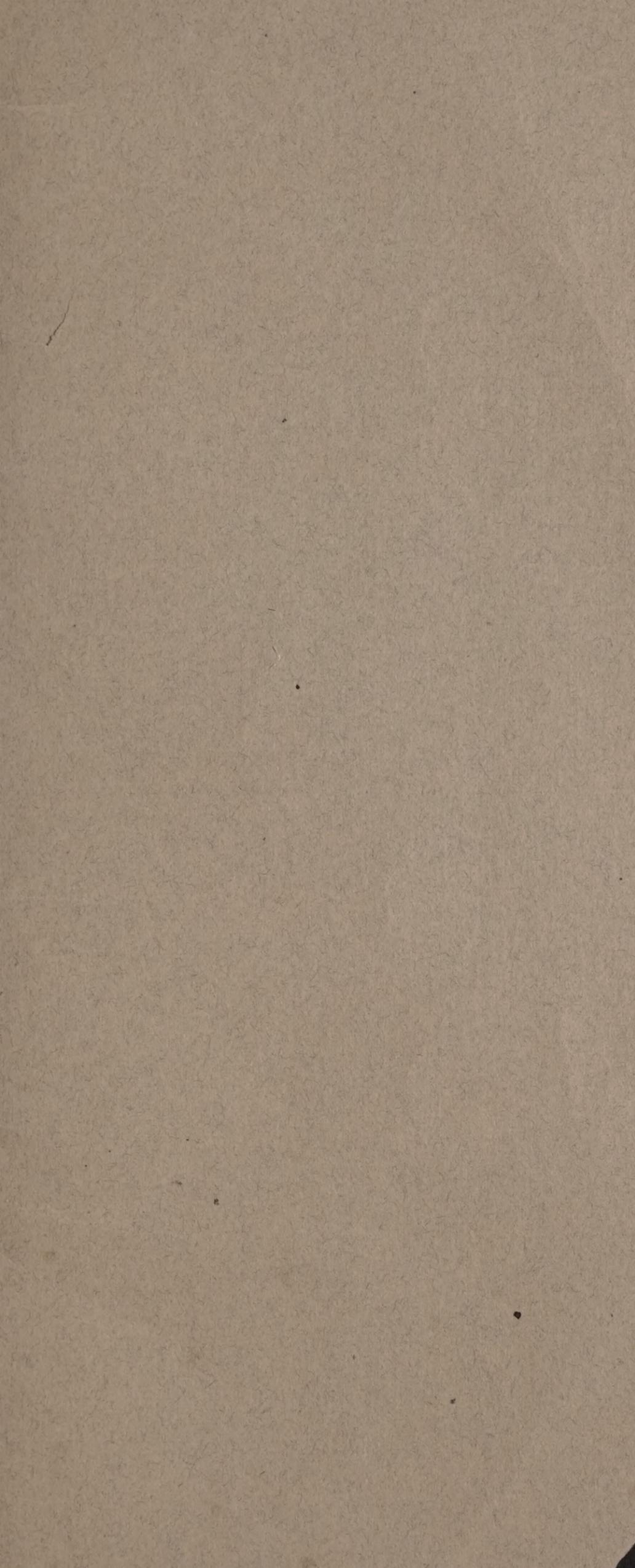
He vanished as swiftly and as silently as the clouds on Ranier vanish before the sun; and, as he went, the chimes in the church tower, close by, began to play, welcoming the Christmas morn.

“*Good Will!*” they sang. “*Good Will toward Men, toward Men! Good Will towards Men!*”

But long before they had ended their song, Polly and Ned had cuddled down again among the blankets and started off to Fairy Land, across the Dream River, to thank the Brown Woman for the good advice she had given them.







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