

Christmas Reflections

Christmas Reflection 1

Though many of my memories from my musical journeys are filled with laughter and good times, there is one I recall for its simple, quiet beauty, for I didn't say a word, and yet I shared that moment with the whole, wide world. I was staying at The Chestnut Inn a few days before Christmas, and the view from my window looked right down over the canal. East Street Canal they called it, though I'm not sure why, for there were no roads with that name anywhere nearby. The canal traced a kind of loop through town, which allowed the school children to race around it on skates in the mid-afternoon, and Dads and Moms to travel the same route in a more leisurely way just before sunset. But the real magic came later that evening!

I had finished with dinner and was back in my room, sitting at the window. The warm glow from the houses across from me, with their bright candles in the windows, made me think of Christmas in the past. While I thought, I noticed a group of skaters coming along the canal, not in ones and twos, but half a dozen or more, swaying in unison, and holding lanterns and books. Slowly they drifted nearer, and when I opened my window for a better look, I found they were singing. It was an old carol I didn't recognize, but beautiful and serene. Just as they faded away to my left, another group appeared around the far bend. There were quite a few kids in this group, but they had the same easy grace about them as they moved, and another group followed them, and another after that, for I had arrived in town on The Night of the Silver Skates, where old and new carols, and young and old alike, flow round and round the loop in a kind of endless parade of music and love.

When time had passed, and most of my favorite Christmas songs had been sung, I thought perhaps it was time to close the window, but the brief lull was only to allow the remaining singers to arrive back at the starting point. There they all joined together for one last time. You might have thought they would choose something big and grand, but it was the same slow procession, even and measured, swaying as they came down the ice. "Silent night, Holy night. All is calm, all is bright." And it was.

The Night of the Silver Skates. I closed the window at last and climbed under the covers for a good night's rest. "Sleep in heavenly peace," I thought, and I drifted off. But outside the trees and the wind kept the music going, and the stars sang song after song as they went round and around.

Christmas Reflection 2

December came, and with it the cold snows, and part of me longed for the warmth of a good fire. My musical adventures had carried me many miles, and most of them had been friendly, but the last few seemed lonely by comparison, and the gray clouds, hurrying past as if they wanted to get home, kept reminding me that mine was far away.

Friendship is a funny thing. It arrives unannounced, not declaring its intentions, nor signaling its value in advance. Only afterwards, when time has set the various pieces down in the distance - then the patterns grow clear. That's how it was with Old Parker. He was the cook at the Kindly Corners Inn. I arrived there, like I said before, in the early days of a cold December.

“Park” was almost always in the kitchen, but it wasn't his old country cooking skills that kept calling me to a warm rocking chair by the wood stove next to the pantry door. It was the way he played his handmade classical guitar. “Made by my Papa,” he would say, “back in the old country,” and then he would be silent for long stretches while tunes from a previous time and place rose from the deep places in his heart, finding their way at last to the six strings beneath his fingers.

It was a curious scene: the rich harvest stored up all around, ingredients enough to last a lifetime, a calendar on the door keeping track of the days, and a clock on the wall to mind the hours. That's where December went by, for the Kindly Corners Inn had become a home for me during the festive season. There Park taught me a few things about cooking, and soon I was getting up before dawn to help get the wood stove going and the bread ready for the oven. There were cookies to be baked, and his own secret gingerbread recipe. It was “culinary music,” he said, for he had a way of saying things. But best of all were the stories by the stove at night, with the wind riding the hills outside, and the music of Christmas on six strings.

There are places where Christmas Eve goes by amid the laughter of crowds in brightly lit villages and caroling on the square, but for Park and me it was almost as if Christmas Eve came early and lasted night after night, while we told the story from a hundred different angles, and heard the music of the centuries.

Snow covered the ground when I came, but there were only patches of it when I left. The coldest winter in years had given way to a gentle south wind. Park stood at the kitchen door and waved and watched till I turned the bend in the road. My knapsack was filled with gingerbread, my heart was filled with friendship, and I can still hear the sweet sound of Christmas on a handmade guitar.

Christmas Reflection 3

High in the woods of Pengrove Pass, where the water and the sky seem to sing the same song, there stands in a clearing beside the lake a little log cabin built by a friend. It stands empty most of the year now, for the children who once played and laughed there have long since moved on. Still there isn't any sadness, for each morning the dawn catches its own reflection in the stillness of the lake, and peace covers all.

I was scheduled to spend Christmas in Pengrove Mills, a town further down the river, but an unexpectedly busy autumn and fall had made me long again for the solitude of the mountains, at least for a little while, and so December found me in the cabin by the lake.

Mountains seem to have a wisdom all their own, and trees growing along the slopes in the pure air whisper their thoughts together in the silence. It's a world of enchantment far and near, for the same snow that paints the distant hills also spreads a blanket over the cabin. Here earth and sky seem so close, mountain peaks just a snow-breath away, and time a cousin of eternity.

This was the year I celebrated Christmas twice - once in the cold loneliness of the hills, and later in the warmth of the town - once by myself in the calm of the night, and again with the sound of friends all around - once with the stars shining deep in the lake, and then with bright lights in every window. But much as I enjoyed the time in town, it was the silence around the cabin that reminded me most of the Song of the ages and the Light of the world. Alone on the hillside, I knew the peace that had come to earth.

It's strange how much we have to get away to find the things that are always there, eternal, unchanging. We're the ones who come back transformed. The message remains the same.

Pengrove Mills was alive with holiday spirit. The sidewalks were bright, the Bake Shoppe was handing out Christmas tree cookies, and carolers appeared here and there. Skating and gifts and lights... it was a lot of fun, and the candlelight service was meaningful. But Christmas at Pengrove Mills was only an echo when all was said and done. What my heart remembered most was Christmas at Pengrove Pass.

Christmas Reflection 4

She was only a little girl, with sparkling eyes and braided hair, but her rich imagination spun elegant tales each night by the fire. All the guests would gather to listen in the front parlor of 3 The Elms. Her name was Angelina. The stories she invented were new each evening, but there was one she saved for last, for everyone wanted it there, and that one never changed. It went along like this.

Once there lived a little stuffed bear by the name of Golden Glow. With his mind he could think beautiful thoughts, and with his eyes he could see things others sometimes missed, but for all his beautiful thoughts and keen vision, he was a silent bear, for he could not speak.

"Come into the kitchen," said the Cook. "You can help me bake gingerbread." Golden Glow liked working in the kitchen. It was warm and inviting. Later the Maid called out "Come build a fire with me." Golden Glow knew just how to set up the wood. "Want to help me set the table?" asked the Hostess. She always complimented him on his fine work. "He shares his heart that way," she told the others. Cook and Maid agreed. They loved and admired their little golden bear.

But Golden Glow's favorite thing was to stand outdoors in the manger scene, while cold winds played through town and snowflakes fell like dancers from the sky. There in the corner he stood, on a little mound of hay next to the wooden camel, and watched the busy

people going by, and thought on the beautiful story. Perhaps some of what he carried in his heart came from moments like these.

One day a Toy Maker came to 3 The Elms. He had a smile that appeared out of nowhere, and kind words for all, but perhaps more important was his ability to see deep into the heart of things. It wasn't long before Golden Glow and he were fast friends. "I have an idea for you," he said to the little bear. Three weeks in a row Golden Glow and the Toy Maker worked on their secret project.

"Oh, look at the beautiful manger scene," said the people walking by, one night as Christmas drew near, but this time they stopped to listen. A clear, bright sound was coming from the corner of the stable. It was a Christmas carol, played on a trumpet. "That's beautiful," the people said. Soon a small crowd had gathered. "Where is that music coming from?" they asked. The Toy Maker stood in the crowd with a smile on his face. He knew.

"Come outside," said the Hostess to Cook and Maid. "Something is happening in the stable." They went out to see. "Look at all the people," said Cook. Then they heard the music. It was the sound of Golden Glow's trumpet.

Night after night, people came to see the manger scene at 3 The Elms, sometimes to sing, but mostly to listen. "Do you hear that?" asked the Hostess. "He shares his heart that way." Cook and Maid agreed. They loved and admired their little golden bear even more.

As for the Toy Maker, he was never seen again. Where he went, no one ever knew. Some said he was weaving his magic and love in other villages down the road. Perhaps they are right, for he could see deep into the heart of things.

Golden Glow still enjoyed baking gingerbread, and helping to build fires, and setting the table. But his most favorite place of all was the stable, and the little mound of hay in the corner, next to the wooden camel.

When Angelina finished, there was always silence. She would turn, look at the fire for a few moments, then climb the stairs to bed. Eventually the guests did the same. None of us ever forgot December at 3 The Elms.

Christmas Reflection 5

"Oh what fun it is to ride," she sang into the cold night air. I had never been in a one-horse open sleigh, but there I was, listening to little Marta sing while sleigh bells jingled and snow whizzed past on the left and the right. She was the woodcarver's daughter.

Yes, I know, it sounds like a fairy tale - the woodcarver and his daughter - but that's how it was, and they lived in a little wooden cabin which Marta called "Fillmore East." It was all decorated for Christmas, as warm and cozy as ever a cabin could be. "This can't be real," I thought, but every time I asked myself if I was dreaming, Marta would come

bouncing into the room with some little suggestion for her father, or another piece of tinsel to hang somewhere, or just a smile and a song.

“Where did you get her?” I asked. The woodcarver just smiled. He was a friend I had known long ago in student days. We were young and carefree then: laughing at the same jokes, playing on the same teams, attending the same classes. Now our paths had crossed again, like circles coming back to where they started. “She’s a miracle,” he said, and then he said no more.

I looked at my friend of years gone by. “How time has softened his heart,” I thought. Marta was standing next to him. It was a silent moment, captured like a forever photograph in the mind, never fading, long remembered.

Nights by the fire were a laugh and a half. Marta had convinced her father to make a box of wooden puppets, and she entertained us with homespun stories, including songs and a variety of funny voices. Her father and I sat there watching, smiling, laughing... sometimes it seemed as if the years rolled away, and we were back in school again, friends sharing the same moments, the same timeless memories. When Marta’s stories were over, we always had “The Fillmore East Feast,” (milk and cookies), and on bright nights a starlit ride in the sleigh.

There came a day when my musical journeys continued on, and I waved goodbye to my friends in the little cabin. But my Christmas memories there are deep, and I’ll never forget Mary, Joseph and the Babe presented by a little singing girl with a box of wooden puppets.

Christmas Reflection 6

May I be like a child this Christmas
Like a child whose eyes are bright with the sparkle of newfound dreams
Who laughs when the dawn paints the skies
And tumbles out of bed to embrace the promise of a new day
That’s what You brought when You came, Lord...
When You came as a Child

May I be like a child who laughs and sings
Quick to give You thanks for little things
Enjoying each treasure and each flying moment
Not reaching back, nor rushing on ahead
Content to find in every little place
A miracle just waiting for me to get there to see it happen
You were the miracle, Lord...
In Bethlehem’s tiny manger

So may I grow, each day a little stronger
Yet still retain so deep within my heart
That childlike freedom, trust and wonder

A never-ending hymn of love to You
Unrehearsed, yet written long before
And true to deeper things
And smiling still when years have run on past
And laughing when the morning calls to me
You are the sunshine, Lord...
Rising in my eastern sky

And when I close each day
With thanks for all You gave
And all the places where You stood beside
Protecting me and keeping me from harm
May I still have the free imagination
To take a peek before I say Amen
And see if maybe Teddie's eyes were closed
Your eyes are always open, Lord... I pray
May I be like a child this Christmas Day

Christmas Reflection 7

“Many a silvery moon has passed,” he sang into the night air, as though the distant stars could hear his voice. “What song is that?” I asked. “Never heard it?” he responded. “Not surprised. It’s an old one. Like me.” He stopped long enough to throw another log on the fire. We were outside, camping out on the hills of lower Cranston County. His name was Ol’ Fred... actually Alfred, but everyone called him Ol’ Fred, and that was his name as far as he was concerned. “What does a name matter anyway?” he once told me. “It’s people that matter - the deep, down inside part of a person... now that’s what matters.”

The stars did their mysterious dance as we talked by the fire. Many a Christmas past we remembered, and talked of old times, but Ol’ Fred wasn’t one to let the past occupy all of his attention. No sir, you could look back - that was all right, but only so as to gain momentum for the present and the ever-unfolding future. Yes, that was his style. “Catch a little fire,” he would say. It was his own phrase, I suppose... another way of reminding himself to get-a-moving-on, and to let the bright memories he had known push him to even brighter stories up ahead.

“Many a silvery moon has passed, but each one took a darkened night.” The fire sang it’s song to the trees and the trees whispered back in the crisp, cold air. “My favorite time of year to go camping,” he added. “Seems like everyone else is so full of rushing these days... caught up on the merry-go-round... only one look tells you they aren’t very merry. Me... I’ll take the distant woods, and the quiet scenery, and a hundred other silent things. Yes, that’s Christmas for real. Out here you can really taste it.” “What a colorful way you have of describing things,” I said to my friend. The starlight shone down as the firelight threw our shadows into the mountains.

“Many a silvery moon has passed, but each one took a darkened night, and spun a golden candle beam of love...” His song was the only sound besides the crackling fire and the

whispering wind. “That’s Christmas,” he told me. “God’s golden candle beam of love, shining in the midst of the darkness... the seed of the dawn... forever sunshine wrapped in a baby. That’s Christmas.”

We watched the fire and spoke of many things, but I was nearer to Christmas that night than on many an evening since, for Ol’ Fred seemed to hear easily what I’ve sometimes missed - a hundred silent things singing the thoughts that are eternal.

A thousand days have come along since then, but that moment lives on. It was Christmas under the stars, camping out on the hills of Cranston County, the fire and the silence of the night, and Ol’ Fred singing “Many a silvery moon has passed, but each one took a darkened night, and spun a golden candle beam of love, erasing earth’s deep dark with heaven’s light.” “Ah, yes,” he said. “That’s Christmas.”

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