

# NELLIE'S CHRISTMAS EVE



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## NELLIE'S CHRISTMAS EVE

It was just before Christmas—the fast coming night  
Fell in darkness and storm; every object was white  
With the soft, drifting snow, falling steadily down  
On the housetops and streets of a New England town.  
Underneath a stone archway, crouched all in a heap,  
A little child nestled as though fast asleep;  
But her dark eyes looked out through the pitiless storm,  
And she drew her shawl closer, to keep herself warm.  
Thus for hours she'd waited—cold, hungry, alone,  
Sad at heart and forsaken—yet never a moan  
Had escaped her pale lips, as her motionless form  
Lay helpless, half-frozen, and drenched by the storm.  
A kind watchman, at length, when going his round,  
Peered into the archway, and the little one found;  
Gently lifted her up in his strong arms, and said,  
“Deary me, little Missy, why aren't you in bed?”  
“Why, because,” sobbed the child, “I have not any bed,  
For my mamma, you see, is what people call dead,  
Though she told me herself, when she bade me good-bye.  
She was going to Heaven, and said I must try  
To be a good girl, and then, by-and-by,  
The dear angels would take me up into the sky.  
Two long nights I have waited, and yet they don't come;  
Do you think that their wings with the cold are too num-

To fly down here and fetch me? Ah! then I must go,  
All alone by myself, through the darkness and snow,  
Till I find dear mamma, and her home, for you see  
I'm afraid she is crying and fretting for me!  
To-morrow, I know, will be Christmas Eve;  
If I only could start right away, I believe  
We might spend it together. So please put me down,  
And show me the shortest way out of the town."  
"But, my child," said the watchman, "I can't let you go  
All alone on your errand through darkness and snow;  
I will keep you to-night, safely sheltered, and warm,  
And if in the morning it ceases to storm,  
We will talk of this journey to lands far away,  
Which you never can reach in the course of a day."  
So poor little Nellie consented, and soon the bright light  
Of the station-house gleamed through the darkness of night;  
And the little one slept, after being well fed,  
Till the daylight shone in on her tiny straw bed.  
Then, "Where am I?" she said, and a look of surprise  
Flitted over her face, while her beautiful eyes  
Filled with tears for a moment, then out on the floor  
Sprung the two little feet. Gently opening the door,  
She noiselessly stole through the hall to the street,  
In the hope that somewhere she might happen to meet  
With her good friend the watchman, who promised that day  
He would start her for Heaven, and tell her the way!  
But in vain did she gaze into each passing face--  
He had disappeared utterly, leaving no trace!  
She wandered all day, and then weary and worn,  
With walking the streets since the earliest dawn,  
On a door-step she sank; cold, exhausted, half-dead!  
"O I wish," cried the child, "I'd a wee bit of bread!"  
She had spoken aloud, and her words reached the ear  
Of a little girl passing, who turned round to hear.



"Gently lifted her up in his strong arms."



“Perhaps this may help you along on your way.”



She was clad in rich velvet, and her long golden hair  
Fell about a sweet face, which shone loving and fair  
On the poor little child that sat at her feet.

"Is it true, little girl, that you've nothing to eat?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Nellie, and looked at the child;

"Are you one of God's angels?" The little one smiled,  
Shook her golden head slowly and whispered, "Ah! no."

"Then I s'pose you can't tell me the way I must go  
To get soonest to Heaven? I wish that I knew  
Why mamma went there, without taking me too."

"I wish I could show you," the gentle child said,

"The pathway that leads to the home of the dead;

But I don't know myself, and might lead you astray,

Though perhaps this may help you along on your way."

And poor Nellie beheld, with great joy and delight,

A purse filled with pennies, all shining and bright,

Which her new friend bestowed, as she bade her good-day,

And without waiting for thanks, ran quickly away.

So the poor little wanderer started once more,

Never stopping to rest till she came to a store,

Where the windows were filled with such bread, and pies,

That to see them was really a treat for the eyes!

First she counted her treasure and, to her delight,

Found she had fifteen pennies, all shining and bright.

Five of these she spent for a loaf of warm bread,

"And the others will help me to Heaven," she said;

"For perhaps if I ride but a part of the way,

I may still reach mamma by the close of the day."

When her bread was eaten, she stopped a street car,

Crept up on the platform, and said: "Please how far

Shall I get if I ride till the end of the day?"

"Well," the driver replied, "I should certainly say,

Quite as far as a child of your age ought to go."

"That will do," answered she, in a voice sweet and low.

Then she curled herself up in a soft little heap,  
And worn out with her journey was soon fast asleep.  
But a touch on her shoulder awoke her at last,  
And a kindly voice said, "Little one, it is past  
The right hour for return—will you go back with me?  
For it's time I was starting my horses, you see."  
"O no, thank you," said Nellie, "I'd rather stay here—  
Can you tell me if Heaven is anywhere near?"  
The man shook his head in a queer, puzzled way,  
And replied, "Well, I really don't know what to say—  
I fear some one's been fooling you—telling you lies."  
The sweet, childish face flushed with sudden surprise,  
As she gently replied, "But I know it is true,  
For that's where mamma is—I'm going there too."  
So without saying more the man lifted her down,  
Then he whipped up his horses, and drove back to town.  
Once again, little Nellie trudged onward alone,  
As the pale, wintry beams of the setting sun shone  
On the snow, which extended for miles all around,  
Clothing all things in white, from the sky to the ground.  
Soon she came to a place, where the road branched in three;  
Then she seated herself on a fallen oak tree.  
"For," she said, "I'm so tired, I think I'll wait here,  
And perhaps Santa Claus, with his tiny reindeer,  
May soon come along, take me into his sleigh,  
And make sure of my getting to Heaven to-day."  
With hope in her heart, but with feet cold and numb,  
In the twilight she waited. "O why doesn't he come?"  
At last sobbed the child, in deep accents of woe;  
Then flung herself hopelessly down in the snow.  
When at length the poor wanderer lifted her head,  
And uncovered her eyes, with a feeling of dread,  
She espied a bright light from a house shining out  
Then she rose with an effort, and turning about,



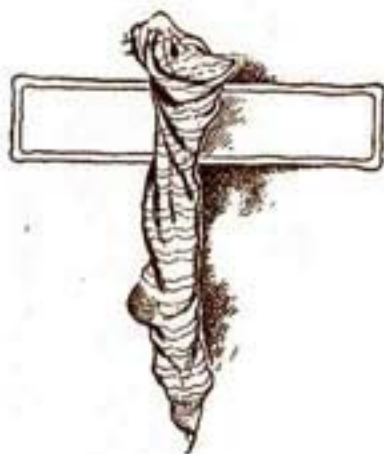
"Then she seated herself on a fallen oak tree."



"Kind help at last to the orphan had come."

With her dim, tearful eyes scarcely heeding the way,  
She half consciously followed its welcoming ray.  
Soon she found herself standing in front of a gate,  
Which she opened and entered. The hour being late,  
All the windows were curtained and dark, except one,  
And from that streamed a light like a ray of the sun.  
Then the child, in her wonder, forgot all her fright,  
Her long, weary tramp through the cold and the night,  
Crept up close to the window, and heard such a din  
Of gay voices and laughter, she longed to peep in.  
So she climbed up a trellis, and then such a sight  
Was revealed to her eyes, that she shut them up tight,  
Then unclosed them again. So strange did it seem,  
That she feared it would prove but a beautiful dream!  
In the room she beheld a fine Christmas Tree,  
All ablaze with bright tapers, while, laughing with glee,  
A frolicsome circle of gay girls and boys,  
Surveyed its rich treasures of candies and toys.  
The dark eyes that looked in from the casement above,  
On this bright, blessed scene of contentment and love,  
For a moment grew dim, the small hands lost their hold  
For the fingers were numb with the frost and the cold,  
And the poor little child tumbled back in the snow,  
With a sharp, bitter cry full of desolate woe.  
The door opened at once, and a broad, cheerful ray  
Fell across the wide path where the little one lay,  
Her brown curls all tangled, her face cold and pale,  
And a look so like death, that a pitiful wail  
Rent the air, as the children, with sorrow profound,  
Knelt about the poor wanderer, low on the ground,  
Then away from the darkness, the cold, and the night,  
Little Nellie was borne to the warmth and the light,  
And hushed were the voices of that merry band,  
As they gathered round Nellie, while each little hand,

Held up some gay treasure from off the bright tree,  
Saying, "Look, little girl! O please wake and see  
What the dear Santa Claus, who was passing this way,  
And paid us a visit, brought here in his sleigh!  
This sweet doll is for you, and this dear little cup,  
And this book full of pictures—O please to wake up!"  
At these words little Nellie unclosed her brown eyes,  
Gazed around her a moment, then said with surprise:  
"So I'm really in Heaven at last! Do you know,  
I have traveled so far through the darkness and snow,  
And the way was so long, that I c<sup>d</sup>'n't believe  
I could possibly get here to keep Christmas Eve!"  
Then a soft, loving voice, whispered low in her ear,  
"The dear Father in Heaven has guided you here.  
You have come to our home this blest Christmas Eve,  
And you never again its protection shall leave!"  
And the sweet Christmas bells bore these tidings afar,  
Till the echoes passed in where the gates were ajar.  
From that day little Nellie was nurtured in love,  
While her mother looked down from the mansions above,  
Breathing blessings and peace on these children of earth,  
Who had taken her child to their hearts and their hearth.





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The End.





