



MRS. ANNIE PIKE GREENWOOD

# The Christmas Child

### CHRISTMAS NEWS PRIZE POEM

Death change the inner souls of us:  
As we were born, so shall we live again,  
Fulfilling all our glorious destiny  
As mothers of all men and worlds and powers  
For aye: eternal motherhood is ours!

#### Futility.

O little hands and feet  
That I would save from harm,  
I can but wait thine utmost fate  
With an impotent arm.  
(Oh, Mary had no power to stay  
The nails that pierced His flesh that day.)  
O little tender heart  
That I would save from pain,  
I wait thy years of bitter tears,  
And know my prayers are vain.  
(Oh, Mary's petitions could not free  
Her Son from bleak Gethsemane.)  
O little pure-of-soul,  
That I would save from blot,  
I can but pray, and watch each day,  
And yet 'twill save thee not.  
(Oh, Mary heard His bitter cry  
When He would fain the cup pass by.)  
O little child of mine,  
I watch, I pray, I wait,—  
I love thee so!—and yet I know  
That thou art thine own fate.  
(Oh, Mary who wept on Calvary,  
Thy Son had chosen His destiny!)

#### To The Unborn.

Be thou a minister, O child of mine,  
To broken spirits and to hearts that pine;  
Bind up the wounded, the discouraged cheer,  
And let thy very presence banish fear;  
Oh, let thy visage give despair denial,  
That at thy coming, whatsoever the trial,  
Men shall be strong, and women feel more safe;  
Child of the childless, parent of the wail,  
O with thy love fill all this emptiness,  
Oh, with thy love fill all this emptiness,  
That palsies half the world with chill distress,—  
Then if my life with thy beginning cease,—  
I was thy mother; I can die in peace.

#### "Lift Up Thy Heart"

Lift up thy heart! The angels sing:  
"Hail! Hail to the King!"  
He as a little child was born,  
Untouched by nail, unshrined by thorn,  
Unshadowed by the transient cross,  
The bitter cup, the Judas-loss;  
So tender-human, so divine,  
His coming thus was but a sign,  
That in His common birth is seen:  
How much a little child can mean!  
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"Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."—St. Luke, Chap. II; 19.

And we who lost—or never found that love—  
That one, illuminating, steadfast love—  
We must walk patiently, and give no sign,  
Mothering all the children of the earth,  
When we grow hungry for the pangs of birth.

Yet this I know: love shall be satisfied;  
(This is the revelation of my soul!)  
There are more worlds than this—more land and sea—  
And when our feet are set upon the way,  
This earth shall pass, and be as yesterday.

We shall be mothers in those far-off climes,  
For women-souls are women-souls for aye!  
And there are many races to be born  
On many stars, for many a lone yet—  
So let no woman yearn, or cry regret.

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#### "Even As Mary."

Even as Mary, so we women wait,  
Some in sad regions where no tapers shine,  
Some with a holy joy the approaching fate,  
And some with shame. (Thy pity, O Divine!)  
And glad or sad, we women of one tie,  
More than the world, our thoughts on Mary mild,  
We wait and listen for a little cry,  
And waiting, ponder on the Christmas Child.  
O Christmas Child! held close to Mary's breast,  
(As we shall hold our little Christmas ones)  
Gladden them forth upon their earthly quest,  
These who shall be our daughters and our sons.  
Couldst Thou not give some dearer blessing then,  
Halo each brow with Thy celestial kiss,  
And set them safely on the pathway when  
They leave that other radiant world for this?  
O send a comforter to her so sad,  
And send an angel unto her in shame,  
And give each little heart some message glad,  
More dear than riches, and more high than fame.  
Even as Mary, so we women wait,  
We many women of one common tie,  
Our lifted eyes on that mysterious gate—  
We wait—and listen for a little cry.

#### Eternal Motherhood.

As we are women, so we must be mothers:  
This is our joy and this our suffering;  
The reason for our being, and our end,—  
Joy 'tis for her whose love is satisfied,  
And suffering for her who is denied.  
So we who know love's dear reciprocation,  
We sit content beside the glowing hearth,  
Or bare our faces to the chilling blast!—  
Since we have held the bodies of our young,  
There is no heart-hymn left for us unsung.

...would be home for a long, long time. Grandmother told me so herself. "No," Grandmother nodded her head and said, "No, she didn't." "Did she tell you what she was going to do?" I asked her with the remembered secret. "No," she said, "she didn't tell me a thing in the morning. Aye, and showed it to me."

"Why, Grandmother, how funny, for she—"

"Not funny, child, for how could she know as I'd seen it? No, she held out her hand with the ring on it and her eyes red and eyes bright. And says she, 'You're going to marry Charles?'"

"Yes, Grandmother, and there she is—"

"No, she told me the first thing in the morning. Aye, and showed it to me."

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"He didn't, he didn't! He wouldn't do no more for me!" Once more she stopped and stared ahead; then she turned to me and said, "But maybe—what did I tell him? I forgot, I can't remember. There was something else why he didn't come." She rested her forehead in her thin hand. "It wasn't one he, it was two—two as starts me in the face, so won't let me sleep or die." A long shudder went through her. Suddenly she caught Tad's arm, so fiercely that it hurt. "Oh? I'm glad you've come, child," she repeated, in her old manner. Her mind seemed to have slipped back to the beginning. "It was coming on again, but for you, it won't come while you're here," she whispered.

"Oh? The nightmare. Look! It begins over there," she whispered shivering, pointing toward the door. Castelle and Tad's glances followed and with a start both heard a noise at what they saw, headless of Grandmother's words.

"No, it wasn't that—"

"In the darkness of her time—the room itself, Castelle could not help pausing. The light from the high window was dimming. There were already shadows in the room; the stove, the back wall, the top of the high cushioned chair behind her, from which Grandmother's face appeared like a bit of dry parchment. Tad too, began to forget her disappointment and grow impatient with her eyes wide open upon her.

Suddenly Grandmother stopped, with a thought flashing into her face. "Oh? But what did Nan care for that? Nan didn't care, Nan wasn't afraid of death. Why should she? She didn't have to die. Nan said she'd never believe it. Nan said it was as if she'd been married. I mind to be dropped. How come Nan to say that? It was my only chance. It was all as he'd died crying to me on the stairs at me, 'Lord! I'll cry. Tell him—though I don't see the point. Tell him, and he won't marry you; he won't die for nobody! Try it. Ask him if he's willing to die for you. Tell him if he marries you he'll have to die. And Nan, she answers you. I'll tell him, he'll only call it nonsense. No, besides, he'll love me he'll be willing to risk anything. Still, I'll die if it's the last thing. Tell him! But maybe my word he'd say.' Raising herself in her chair, with a lightning change, her voice shrilly triumphant, the old woman ended. "Nan be didn't!"

"Oh!" breathed Tad, casting a glance of appreciation at her companion. He sat down, shocked, one hand clutching where it rested on his knee, with the words.

"Boy? Oh, the Christmas story. Had I got past where Jack Frost he comes to?"

Grandmother interrupted, nodding. "Jack he comes along past the window and sees—Ha, that was it," she broke off. "I mind now, Castelle, he saw through the doorway, just what I said. But I lied to him. I told him Nan was to marry Jack. Hear? I told him that! But it wasn't me to blame," Grandmother called. "I never let thought to put for Castelle's putting it to my mind. Says he when he comes in that morning, Merry Christmas—though Lord knows it wasn't merry for his worry and fearing. Said it, 'It ha' ought to be for some folk, there going to be a wedding—meaning Jack and Grace Harlow. But Castelle ha' taken it for himself, and blazes up like and says he hopes so. Sh—listen—!" She held her finger up and leaned forward.

"Nan's not mine, ah?"

"Tad glared painfully at Nan. Nan made no sign. She had not moved since she had leaned against the door; nor had Castelle, though the look on his face had changed. He was turned toward Nan, but he was silent, his eyes narrowing imperceptibly, for every quivering of a shrill word from Grandmother was no longer any need of an agreement for silence. One might have said a very life hung on what the old woman was saying.

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...when it mattered?" Nan had asked with a sudden pain at her heart. "I'm surprised too, he answered. "It matters so much that I leave on this-born today."

Reading he took his hat, wishing her happiness—but wished that he might have known before—

That was all, but now each word returned cruelly laden with its different meanings. The very cruelty made the two relations. Had tears found their way to Nan's eyes, though they did not fall but glittered there, at the horror of the old woman's confession. It made both deaf in a whirling of their own thoughts to understand—to Grandmother's pathetic wailings.

"It was death for me—death you understand, and I'm afraid of death. See, that's the nightmare that begins over there! It's death which chooses a body in the night. It stretches my throat and won't let me go and grips horribly and says—'It's get you! It's death. Eh? you don't frighten, child?' Grandmother flung a frowning laugh—'Try catch.' 'Are you afraid of death?' 'No, I don't think so. I don't know what it means.' 'But a little shudder went through her nevertheless. 'Oh, so you don't. You don't have to die,' Grandmother wailed, 'not for years and years! But if you could see it crawling on—'"

"The old hand the old hand the old hand. Tighter. 'No, no, I couldn't tell Nan it wasn't Castelle. I lied to her. And now—'"

Even Castelle and Nan could not listen now but with some sort of pity.

"What was I to do? It wasn't me, it wasn't a little while—"

"Oh, yes, Grandmother," she moaned, nodding her head. "Any day. And how it's what I've done I'm afraid of more than death, it's Nan. God, if she knew—Oh, Tad, you won't believe what I've been telling you? It's all made up, hasn't it? She seemed to pull herself out of herself for a moment. 'You'll never tell Nan if I've been telling you, will you?' Eh, child, you won't, will you?" she said finally.

"But a good—'pious' Nan did hear it—what would she do?"

"Hey? Do? She'd kill me!"

"Oh, no, no, Grandmother! Tad cried, shocked with a look at Nan. "She wouldn't. How could she?"

Grandmother leaned forward. "She'd look at me so, and me blind, I could see her eyes flash, and I'd kill me though she said never a word."

"Oh, no," Tad repeated. "I know she wouldn't. Nan would just say: 'It's a very foolish story, Grandmother, that's all. I don't think she's mind if it wasn't so—'" She hesitated for a