

THE STORY OF THE CHRISTMAS GUEST BY HELEN STEINER RICE



It happened one day at December's end
Some neighbors called on an old-time friend.
And they found his shop so meager and mean,
Made gay with a thousand boughs of green.

And old Conrad was sitting with face ashine.
When he suddenly stopped as he stitched the twine.
And he said "My friends at dawn today,
When the cock was crowing the night away,

The Lord appeared in a dream to me.
And He said, 'I'm coming your guest to be"
So I've been busy with feet astir,
Strewing my shop with branches of fir.

The table is spread and the kettle is shined,
And over the rafters the holly is twined.
And now I'll wait for my Lord to appear;
And listen closely so I will hear,

His steps as he nears my humble place.
And I'll open the door and I'll look on his face."
Then his friends went home and left Conrad alone,
For this was the happiest day he had known.

For long since his family had passed away.
And Conrad had spent many a sad Christmas Day.
But he knew with the Lord as his Christmas guest,
This Christmas would be the dearest and best.

So he listened with only joy in his heart,
And with every sound he would rise with a start,
And looked for the Lord to be at his door.
Like the vision that he had had a few hours before.



So he ran to the window after hearing a sound,
But all he could see on the snow covered ground
Was a shabby beggar whose shoes were torn.
And all his clothes were ragged and worn.

But old Conrad was touched and he went to the door
And he said, "Your feet must be cold and sore.
I have some shoes in my shop for you.
And I have a coat to keep you warmer, too."

So with grateful heart the man went away.
But Conrad notice the time of day
And he wondered what made the dear Lord so late,
And how much longer he'd have to wait.

Then he heard another knock, and he ran to the door,
But it was only a stranger once more.
A bent old lady with a shawl of black,
And a bundle of kindling piled on her back.

But she asked only for a place to rest,
A place that was reserved, for Conrad's great guest.
But her voice seemed to plead, "Don't send me away,
Let me rest for awhile this Christmas Day."

So Conrad brewed her a steaming cup
And told her to sit at the table and sup.
After she had left, he was filled with dismay
For he saw that the hours were slipping away

The Lord had not come as He said He would
And Conrad felt sure he had misunderstood.
When out of the stillness he heard a cry.
“Please help, me and tell me – Where am I?”

So again he opened his friendly door.
And stood disappointed as twice before.
It was a child who had wandered away,
And was lost from her family on Christmas Day.

Again Conrad’s heart was heavy and sad,
But he knew he could make this little girl glad.
So he called her in and he wiped her tears,
And he quieted all her childish fears.

Then he led her back to her home once more.
Then as he entered his own darkened door,
He knew that the Lord was not coming today,
For the hours of Christmas, had all passed away.

So he went to his room, and he knelt down to pray.
He said, “Lord, why did you delay?
What kept You from coming to call on me?
I wanted so much Your face to see.”



Then softly, in the silence, a voice he heard.
“Lift up your head – I have kept My word.
Three times my shadow crossed your floor.
Three times I came to your lowly door.

I was the beggar with bruised cold feet;
I was the woman you gave something to eat;
I was the child on the homeless street.

Three times I knocked, three times I came in,
And each time I found the warmth of a friend.
Of all the gifts, love is the best.
I was honored to be your Christmas guest.

