



6

Christmas With A Difference

This is a touching story based on an episode from *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. Four girls, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy had been brought up by their mother who tried very hard to instil all the desirable human values in them. In this portion of the story, the author has effectively narrated the way in which the March girls learnt how to put the needs of others above their own requirements. And, in so doing this, they discovered the true meaning of Christmas.

Jo was the first to get up in the grey dawn of Christmas morning. She remembered her mother's promise. Slipping her hand under her pillow, she drew out a little crimson-covered book. She knew it very well, for it was that beautiful old story of the best life ever lived, and Jo felt that it was a true guide-book for any pilgrim going along the long journey of life. She woke Meg with a "Merry Christmas", and bade her see what was under her pillow. A green-covered book appeared, with the same picture inside, and a few words written by their mother, which made their present very precious in their eyes. Presently, Beth and Amy woke, to rummage and find their

little books also. One was dove-coloured and the other, blue-coloured. They all sat looking at and talking about them, while the east grew rosy with the coming day.

“Girls,” said Meg seriously, looking from the tumbled head beside her to the two little night-capped ones in the room beyond, “Mother wants us to read and love and mind these books, and we must begin at once.”

Then she opened her new book and began to read. Jo put her arm round her, and leaning cheek to cheek, joined the reading.

“How good Meg is! Come, Amy, let’s do as they do. I’ll help you with the hard words, and they’ll explain things if we don’t understand,” whispered Beth, very much impressed by the pretty books and her sister’s example.

“Where is Mother?” asked Meg.

“Goodness only knows. Some poor critter come a-blessing,” and your ma went straight off to see what was needed. There never was such a woman for givin’ away vittles and drinks, clothes and firin,” replied Hannah, who had lived with the family since Meg was born, and was considered by them all more as a friend than a servant.

“She will be back soon, I think; so have everything ready,” said Meg, looking over the presents which were collected in a basket and kept under the sofa, ready to be produced at the proper time.

“Why, where is Amy’s bottle of cologne?” she asked, as the little flask did not appear.

“She took it out a minute ago, and went off with it to put a ribbon on it, or some such notion,” replied Jo.

“There’s Mother, hide the basket, quick!” cried Jo, as a door slammed, and steps sounded in the hall.

Amy came in hastily, and looked rather abashed when she saw her sisters all waiting for her.

“Where have you been, and what are you hiding behind you?” asked Meg, surprised to see, by her hood and cloak, that lazy Amy had been out so early.

“Don’t laugh at me, Jo! I didn’t mean anyone should know till the time came. I only meant to change the little bottle for a big one and I gave all my money to get it, and I’m truly trying not to be selfish any more.”

Amy showed the handsome flask which replaced the cheap one; while Beth ran to the window and picked her finest rose to ornament the stately bottle.

“You see. I felt ashamed of my present, after reading and talking about being good this morning, so I ran round the corner and changed it the minute I was up; and I’m so glad, for mine is the handsomest now.”

Another bang on the street door sent the basket under the sofa, and the girls to the table, eager for breakfast.

“Merry Christmas, Marmee! Many of them! Thank you for our books; we read some, and mean to, every day,” they cried in chorus.

“Merry Christmas, little daughters! I want to say one word before we sit down. Not far away from here lies a poor woman with a little new-born baby. Six children are huddled into one bed to keep from freezing, for they have no fire. There is nothing to eat over there; and the oldest boy came to tell me they were suffering from hunger and cold. My girls, will you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?”

They were all very hungry, having waited nearly an hour. For a minute no one spoke. Only a minute, for Jo exclaimed impetuously, “I’m so glad you came before we began!”



They were soon ready, and the procession set out.

A poor, bare, miserable room it was, with broken windows, no fire, ragged bed-clothes, a sick mother, a wailing baby, and a group of pale, hungry children cuddled under one old quilt, trying to keep themselves warm.

How the big eyes stared and blue lips smiled as the girls went in!

“Oh my God! It is good angels come to us!” said the poor woman, crying for joy.

“That is good, kind angel children!” cried the poor things, as they ate the food the girls spread on the table.

The girls had never been called angel children before, and thought it very agreeable. I think there were not in all the city four merrier people than the hungry little girls, who gave away their breakfasts and contented themselves with bread and milk on Christmas morning.

“That’s loving our neighbour better than ourselves, and I like it,” said Meg, as they set out their presents, while their mother was upstairs collecting clothes for the poor Hummels.

Not a very splendid show, but there was a great deal of love done up in the few little bundles; and the tall vase of red roses, white chrysanthemums, and trailing vines, which stood in the middle, gave quite an elegant air to the table.

“She’s coming! Strike up, Beth! Open the door, Amy! Three cheers for Marmee!” cried Jo, prancing about, while Meg went to conduct Mother to the seat of honour.

Beth played her gayest march, Amy threw open the door, and Meg performed the role of escort with great dignity. Mrs March was both surprised and touched; and smiled with her eyes filled with tears as she examined her presents, and read the little notes which accompanied them. The slippers went on at once, a new handkerchief was slipped into her pocket, well scented with Amy's cologne, the rose was fastened in her bosom, and the nice gloves were pronounced a "perfect fit."

There was a good deal of laughing and kissing and explaining, in the simple, loving fashion which makes these home festivals so pleasant at the time, so sweet to remember long afterwards, and then all fell to work.

*A story adapted from an episode in
Little Women series by Louisa May Alcott*

GLOSSARY

pilgrim	:	person who goes on a religious or spiritual journey
precious	:	very dear
dove- coloured	:	pinkish grey coloured
rummage	:	search
critter	:	creature; person
cologne	:	a kind of perfume
vittles	:	food

ragged	:	torn
firin	:	fuel
abashed	:	embarrassed
Marmee	:	mummy
huddled	:	crowded
prancing	:	dancing and jumping
chrysanthemum	:	a large , brightly coloured garden flower shaped like a ball.

COMPREHENSION

I. Answer the following questions:

1. Who was the first to wake on Christmas morning?
2. What was under Meg's pillow?
3. What did their mother want them to do with the books?
4. Who came to their house?
5. What did the girls do when their mother came inside?
6. What did the mother tell them before breakfast?
7. Who called the girls "angel children"?
8. For whom was their mother collecting clothes?

II. Read also the following passage and answer the questions that follow:

In those days, it is said that there lived a white flying horse at a corner of the mountain. Chhura and Naa heard about this strange creature and decided to catch it and domesticate it. They went to the forest and proceeded to the top of the hill.

There they found the very horse that they were searching for. They approached it as silently as they could. It was ready to fly off. Then luckily, Chhura manage to catch on to its legs while Naa held on to chhura by his waist.

But the flying horse carried them up into the sky and flew around the hill.

1. What did Chhura and Naa hear about ?
.....
2. What did they decide ?
.....
3. What did they do ?
.....
4. Where did they find the horse ?
.....
5. How did they approach the horse ?
.....
6. How did Chhura manage to catch it ?
.....
7. What did the horse do after it had been caught ?
.....