

## My Christmas Miracle<sup>1)</sup>

For many of us, one Christmas stands out from all the others, the one when the meaning of the day shone clearest. My own “truest” Christmas began on a rainy spring day in the bleakest year of my life.

Recently divorced, I was in my 20s, had no job and was on my way downtown to go the rounds of the employment offices. I had no umbrella, for my old one had fallen apart, and I could not afford another one. I sat down in the streetcar — and there against the seat was a beautiful silk umbrella with a silver handle inlaid<sup>2)</sup> with gold and flecks of bright enamel<sup>3)</sup>. I had never seen anything so lovely.

I examined the handle and saw a name engraved among the golden scrolls. The usual procedure would have been to turn in the umbrella to the conductor, but on impulse I decided to take it with me and find the owner myself. I got off the streetcar in a downpour and thankfully opened the umbrella to protect myself. Then I searched a telephone book for the name on the umbrella and found it. I called and a lady answered.

Yes, she said in surprise, that was her umbrella, which her parents, now dead, had given her for a birthday present. But, she added, it had been stolen from her locker at school (she was a teacher) more than a year before. She was so excited that I forgot I was looking for a job and went directly to her small house. She took the umbrella, and her eyes filled with tears.

The teacher wanted to give me a reward, but — though twenty dollars was all I had in the world — her happiness at retrieving<sup>4)</sup> this special possession was such that to have accepted money would have spoiled something. We talked for a while, and I must have given her my address. I don't remember.

The next six months were wretched<sup>5)</sup>. I was able to obtain only temporary employment here and there, for a small salary. But I put aside twenty-five or fifty cents when I could afford it for my little girl's Christmas presents. My last job ended the day before Christmas, my thirty-dollar rent was soon due, and I had fifteen dollars to my name — which Peggy and I would need for food. She was home from convent boarding school and was excitedly looking forward to her gifts next day, which I had already purchased. I had bought her a small tree, and we were going to decorate it that night.

The air was full of the sound of Christmas merriment as I walked from the streetcar to my small apartment. Bells rang and children shouted in the bitter dusk of the evening, and windows were lighted and everyone was running and laughing. But there should be no Christmas for me, I knew, no gifts, no remembrance whatsoever<sup>6)</sup>. As I struggled through the snowdrifts, I had just about reached the lowest point in my life. Unless a miracle happened, I would be homeless in January, foodless, jobless. I had prayed steadily for weeks, and there had been no answer but this coldness and darkness, this harsh air, this abandonment. God and men had completely forgotten me. I felt so helpless and so lonely. What was to become of us?

I looked in my mail box. There were only bills in it, a sheaf of them, and two white envelopes which I was sure contained more bills. I went up three dusty flights of stairs and I cried, shivering in my thin coat. But I made myself smile so I could greet my little daughter

with a pretense of happiness. She opened the door for me and threw herself in my arms, screaming joyously and demanding that we decorate the tree immediately.

Peggy had proudly set our kitchen table for our evening meal and put pans out and three cans of food which would be our dinner. For some reason, when I looked at those pans and cans, I felt broken-hearted. We would have only hamburgers for our Christmas dinner tomorrow. I stood in the cold little kitchen, misery overwhelmed me. For the first time in my life, I doubted the existence and his mercy, and the coldness in my heart was colder than ice.

The doorbell rang and Peggy ran fleetly to answer it, calling that it must be Santa Claus. Then I heard a man talking heartily to her and went to the door. He was a delivery man, and his arms were full of parcels<sup>7)</sup>. "This is a mistake," I said, but he read the name on the parcels and there were for me. When he had gone I could only stare at the boxes. Peggy and I sat on the floor and opened them. A huge doll, three times the size of the one I had bought for her. Gloves. Candy. A beautiful leather purse. Incredible. I looked for the name of the sender. It was the teacher, the address was simply "California", where she had moved.

Our dinner that night was the most delicious I had ever eaten. I forgot I had no money for the rent and only fifteen dollars in my purse and no job. My child and I ate and laughed together in happiness. Then we decorated the little tree and marveled at it. I put Peggy to bed and set up her gifts around the tree and a sweet peace flooded me like a benediction. I had some hope again. I could even examine the sheaf of bills without cringing<sup>8)</sup>.

□by Taylor Caldwell

## 圣诞节的奇迹

对我们许多人来说，总有某一个圣诞节因为我们充分感受到这一天的意义而显得格外难忘。我自己的“最真实”的圣诞节发生在我一生中最为凄凉的那一年。

话得从春季的一个雨天开始说起，20多岁的我，刚刚离婚，没有工作，正再一次赶往市中心的求职处。我没带伞，旧伞已经破损，而新的又买不起。我在有轨电车里坐下来，发现座位边有一把漂亮的丝质伞，银把手上面还镶嵌着金子和亮丽的小片珐琅。我从没见过这么漂亮的东西。

我查看了把手，发现在金色的卷轴中刻着一个名字。在这种情况下，人们通常的做法是把伞交给售票员，但我一时冲动决定把伞留着，自己去找失主。我在倾盆大雨中下了车，感激不尽地打开那把伞遮雨。随后我在电话簿里查找伞上的名字，确有其人。我打了个电话，接电话的是一位女士。

是的，她诧异地说那是她的伞，那是她已故的双亲送给她的生日礼物。但是，她补充说，伞一年多前被人从学校的柜子里偷走了（她是个教师）。我听出她很激动，我竟忘了自己还在找工作，直接到她家去了。她热泪盈眶地接过伞。

那老师要给我酬金，尽管我当时身边一共也不过20元钱，可看到她找回这件特别之物的巨大幸福时，接受她的钱无疑会破坏这种感觉。我们聊了一会儿。我很可能留下了我的地址。我记不得了。

接下来的半年里我的境况很凄凉。我设法四处打点零工，挣些微薄的薪水。但我尽可能每个月存 25 或 50 美分以备给小女儿买圣诞礼物。就在圣诞节的前一天，我又失去了工作。30 元的房租很快就到期了，而我一共只有 15 元——这是佩吉和我的生活费。她从女修道院办的寄宿学校回来了，十分激动地等着第二天的礼物，那是我早就买好了的。我给她买了一棵小树，打算晚上再装饰。

我下了电车一路走回家，空中弥漫着圣诞节的欢乐气氛。铃儿叮当响着，孩子们在寒风刺骨的黄昏里叫喊着；四周是万家灯火，每个人在奔跑着，欢笑着。但我知道，对我来说，将没有圣诞节可言，没有礼物，没有怀念，什么都没有。处在人生低谷的我在暴风雪中艰难地行走着。除非奇迹出现，要不我在 1 月份便将无家可归，没有食物，也没有工作。我已经坚持祈祷了好几个星期，但没有任何回应，只有这寒冷，这黑暗，这刺骨的风，还有这被遗弃的痛苦。上帝和人类都把我完全遗忘了。我感到自己那么无力，那么孤独。我们的命运将如何呢？

回到家我打开邮箱，只有一把账单，还有两个白色的信封，肯定里面装的也是账单。我爬上三层积满灰尘的楼梯，禁不住凄然泪下，又加衣衫单薄冷得直打哆嗦。但我擦擦眼泪，强挤出笑容，要让自己在女儿面前露出喜悦之情。她打开门，直扑我的怀抱，欣喜地喊叫着要马上装饰圣诞树。

佩吉已自豪地支好了桌子，摆上盘子和 3 个罐头，这就是我们的晚餐。不知道为什么，当我看着那些盘子和罐头时，我心痛欲碎。明天的圣诞晚餐我们将只有汉堡包。我站立在又冷又窄小的厨房里，满腹悲伤。有生以来我第一次怀疑仁慈上帝的存在，心里比冰雪还要冷。

这时门铃响了，佩吉一边飞奔着去开门，一边叫着一定是圣诞老人。随后我听到一个人 与佩吉在热情交谈，便走了过去。他是邮递员，抱着好几个包裹。“这弄错了吧，”我说，但他念出包裹上的名字，确实是给我的。他走后，我吃惊地盯着这些盒子。佩吉和我在地板上坐下来，把包裹打开。一个大大的娃娃，有我给她买的娃娃 3 倍大，还有手套、糖果、漂亮的皮夹子。难以置信。我找出了寄送者的名字，是那个教师，上面只简单地写着“加利福尼亚”，她已经搬到那儿去了。

那天的晚饭是我吃过的最可口的晚饭。我忘了还得交房租，忘了兜里只有 15 元钱，忘了自己还没有工作。我和孩子边吃边幸福地欢笑着。饭后我们装点小圣诞树，装点得那么漂亮让我们自己都惊奇不已。我安置好佩吉睡觉，将她的礼物放在圣诞树的周围。一种甜蜜的宁静笼罩着我，像在给我祝福，我心里又燃起了希望。我甚至可以毫不畏惧地打开那一叠账单了。

### NOTE 注释：

miracle ['mirəkl] n. 奇迹，奇事

inlay ['in'leɪ] vt. 镶嵌，充填

enamel ['ɪnæməl] n. 珐琅，瓷釉

retrieve [ri'tri:v] vt. 重新得到，找回

wretched ['retʃɪd] adj. 可怜的，悲惨的

whatsoever [wɒtsəʊ'veə(r)] pron. 无论什么

parcel ['pɑ:sl] n. 小包，包裹

cringe [krɪndʒ] vi. 畏缩，阿谀，奉承

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