

A Book for Jerry

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AFTER DRINKING TEA, MR. JUDDIKINS WOULD PUT ON HIS SHABBY HAT AND HIS SKIMPY OVERCOAT, KISS THEM ALL AROUND AND GO OFF

IT SEEMED to Jerry that he would really die if he didn't get a book that Christmas. Here he was, eight years old, learning to read, liking to read better than almost anything else in the world, and he had no book to read from. He read at school in books furnished by somebody or other, Jerry didn't know who, but that wasn't enough. Jerry wanted a book for his very own. He wanted it big enough to carry under his arm, and small enough to put under his pillow at night. He wanted it to have a blue cover with gold letters on it. He wanted it to have stories in it about bears and St. Bernards and dragons and boys—no girls; stories, too, about snakes and explorers and boats and soldiers. He wanted the book to have red and yellow and green pictures of airplanes and lions and pirates, one picture on every page.

This was the book Jerry wanted. This was the book he dreamed of in bed at night and thought about in the daytime, the book he pretended to carry under his arm and made believe was under his pillow. But there wasn't the slightest chance of Jerry's getting that book, or any book. Indeed, Jerry would have been ashamed to mention the word "book" at home. People don't talk airily about blue-and-gold books when their mothers don't have enough breakfast and their fathers don't have enough supper and nobody in the whole family ever has enough dinner, even on Sunday.

AND that was the appalling state of affairs at the Juddikins'. Nobody ever mentioned it, but there it was. They hadn't enough food, they hadn't enough fire, they hadn't enough clothes. There were five Juddikins: Mr. Juddikins, Mrs. Juddikins, Jerry Juddikins, the baby Juddikins, and Mutt Juddikins, who, though he was only a dog and, as dogs go, not of high social position, yet was a highly important member of the Juddikins family. He was a mutt dog, the Juddikins frankly called him Mutt, yet this dog was far from a mutt at heart. Indeed, he had a thoroughbred soul, such as some of your blue-blooded aristocratic dogs never dream of having. He never whined when he was hungry, like the fussy little Pomeranian next door. He didn't need a silk pillow to sleep on, like the lazy Peking-ess across the street. Not much. Mutt was a real sport. He took what he got, which wasn't much, but it was always all that the Juddikins could give him: bread and gravy, potatoes sometimes, even a bone now and then, a skimpy, dry bone, to be sure, but none the less a bone. Mutt took these and was grateful and happy, even put on airs as if it were a feast that the Juddikins had set before him.

For Mutt was not only a sport, he was also a swell. He carried his tail at the most elegant angle. He picked up his feet with style and dignity. His were drawing-room manners. He had shameful ancestors; his grandfather on his mother's side had been a mere roustabout dog, one of those villains who spend their lives fighting and stealing and cheating man and beast alike. Mutt remembered him well; he had died in a brawl which was the talk of the alley for days. Then there was Mutt's grandmother on his father's side, a dissolute old

dog who ate a cat a day when she was home, and who, when she was't home, wandered abroad pillaging and plundering like a very pirate among dogs. She dined on garbage and slept in ash cans. Mutt's own mother was far from a lady, his father was a brute, and their home life was deplorable.

And yet along came Mutt, their descendant, a gentleman if not a scholar, a dog well-mannered, refined, gallant, heroic. The last of a long line of ruffians, thieves, bullies and traitors, Mutt was a cavalier among dogs, and he lived with the Juddikins and was the very center of their small and humble universe.

Some people said the Juddikins ought not to keep Mutt; they were too poor. But, as Mrs. Juddikins said, when you're very poor you need a dog the most of all, and as for giving up Mutt, rich or poor, the Juddikins would as soon have considered giving up the baby. I do believe. Of course the baby was very sweet and far more intelligent, and one thing he didn't do, he didn't swallow buttonhooks and hairbrushes all day long, as the foolish Juddikins baby tried to do.

THE Juddikins would have been a very happy family, I then, if only they hadn't been so poor. But they were poor. There was hardly any money at all in Mr. Juddikins' pocket, none at all in Mrs. Juddikins' pocket, less than none in the brown box on the mantelpiece, for there, where the money used to be, were now only bills. Bills for the rent of the Juddikins' tiny house, bills for the doctor, for once the baby did really swallow part of the hairbrush, and old Doctor Jollyman had to come running and fish out the bristles.

It was all because Mr. Juddikins didn't have a job. Fathers have to have jobs, it seems, to keep families going, and Mr. Juddikins didn't have one, so his family wasn't kept going very well. It scared Mr. Juddikins half to death sometimes to think that the whole family depended on him like this. Mrs. Juddikins, Jerry Juddikins, the baby Juddikins, Mutt—all had stomachs to fill, all had bodies to be warmed at the fire, and this not to mention Mr. Juddikins, who was hungry and cold himself all the time.

Every morning Mr. Juddikins would start out to look for a job. First he would rise early and call everbody, "Get up,

mother! Get up, Jerry! Get up, baby!" Mutt was the only one who didn't have to be told to get up. Then Mr. Juddikins would bustle around and make a fire, oh, a very small one, and while Mrs. Juddikins was making the tea, oh, a very small pot, Mr. Juddikins would put on his clean collar and his stringy black tie, and sing as he looked at himself in the mirror. Mr. Juddikins was, you see, of a cheerful disposition. If he had not been, he could never have sung as he looked at himself in the mirror. Mr. Juddikins would then take his tea. He made dreadful faces over the tea, for he didn't like it without milk and the Juddikins had no milk, except the baby, who had nothing else, unless you count the bristles.

AFTER drinking tea and making faces for a while, Mr. Juddikins would put on his shabby hat and his skimpy overcoat, kiss them all around and go off. In one pocket he carried a bit of lunch, in the other a letter of recommendation. In his heart Mr. Juddikins bore a strange and thrilling hope: Today he would get the job, and henceforth all would be rosy and jolly for the Juddikins family. But somehow today was never the day, and every night Mr. Juddikins would come home tired and discouraged, his cheerful eyes clouded, his smile gone, his perky leg sagging at a most dejected angle. It was all very bad, and Jerry felt so sorry for his father. Book indeed! What kind of boy would he be to mention book at a time like this?

Jerry went to school on Peppermint Place. It was a lovely school, where canaries sang in little glittering cages and geraniums bloomed like red soldiers in straight rows at the windows, and where in winter a fire boomed in a big, deep fireplace, and in summer the peppermint trees flung white-blossomed arms in at the windows. Were they really peppermint trees? I confess I don't know. The grown-ups said not, and called them lindens and catalpas and chestnuts.



AS JERRY WATCHED HIS LETTER GO UP THE CHIMNEY, HE FELT A TUG AT HIS HEART HE HAD NEVER QUITE FELT BEFORE

But the children said they were: else why should the square be called Peppermint Place? Grown-ups have a tiresome way of being right about things like that, yet why should a square be called Peppermint Place if the trees aren't peppermint trees? Moreover, the children said that if you went to the square at midnight the flowers were peppermint, and they said they could smell them in the early morning when they first got to school—a left-over, faint but delicious smell that was nothing if it was not peppermint blossoms washed over with midnight dew. Nobody had ever been at Peppermint Place at midnight, so nobody could really deny what the children said. So I am inclined

to believe that for once the grown-ups were wrong, and that the trees were really peppermint—at midnight anyway.

From nine to ten the children at this school read and did arithmetic problems. Jerry had struggled from nine to ten many mornings with the queer marks in his primer, until, on one morning he found he could read—all as sudden and surprising as that. From ten to eleven they sang and drank cocoa and played games around the fire. From eleven to twelve they took naps, then read some more, and looked up cities and rivers on the big globe over by the red soldiers in the window, and wrote on the blackboard. From twelve to one they played in the garden behind the school. This was a special garden, just for children. It had signs up like these: "Parents Not Allowed"; "Please Walk on the Grass"; "Trespassing Allowed." And at one o'clock the children went home.

Jerry loved school. He loved the reading and the cocoa and the geraniums on parade, though he did wonder sometimes about those geraniums. Didn't they get tired of just being dressed up and parading, and long to break

ranks and have a good fight? Even toy soldiers have wars; these were such peaceful soldiers. But you can't fight if you don't have any enemies, and the geranium soldiers didn't. Everybody loved them; consequently their life was one long peace. Jerry liked the boys at school, too—Peter the Little, and Johnnie O'Day, and the Bumpus twins who had such interesting pockets, fishing worms and marbles and snake skins and arrows and tops and kite strings and magnets, all in one inviting jumble. He even liked the butterflies on top of the girls' heads, pink and brown and red ribbons that perched there and looked always ready to fly.

But he didn't like the girls. He simply couldn't stand the girls. Girls swished their skirts, for one thing, the important silly creatures; swished them into the room and down the aisles, and even when they got safely into their seats they swished and fidgeted and squirmed around, spread out those skirts in wide



NO CHRISTMAS BOOKS FOR CHILDREN! WHAT A TERRIBLE THING!

circles around them, and patted them down in such an utterly silly way. They snickered, too, all the time. Hee, hee, hee! Tee, hee, hee! Jerry could positively hear them in his sleep; he could see them in the dark, putting up small hands before their faces, hee-heeing and tee-heeing behind them, and rolling foolish eyes around. Also, they were cowards and cravens—squealed at the sight of a spider, couldn't climb a tree worth a cent, sniffled when their feelings were hurt. A detestable tribe, girls!

Jerry used to wonder if his baby sister would grow up to be one of them, swishing her skirts and giggling and sniffing.



ONCE KATINKA STOPPED IN FRONT OF JERRY'S HOUSE TO PAT MUTT

Most likely. Anybody that would eat hairbrushes would no doubt grow up just as silly. And he used to wonder, too, how it was that women like his mother and the teacher, such utterly lovely people as they now were, had ever been just girls. Could his teacher really have been like these? Did she never throw a ball right, or climb a tree decently, or carry a toad in her pocket? Oh, yes, toads! The girls said they made warts. Fancy that, if you can. Warts! And supposing toads did make warts, who cared? No, Jerry couldn't endure girls, and that was why he didn't want a single girl in his whole book when he got it, if he ever did get it. A world without girls was impossible, it seemed; there were such hordes and swarms of them; but a book without girls was entirely feasible, and that was the kind of book Jerry wanted.

And then one day, two weeks before Christmas, it suddenly began to look as though Jerry might get his book after all. It was the teacher's idea, and when she had suggested it Jerry wondered why in the world he hadn't thought of such a simple thing. The teacher said: "Now today we're going to write our letters to Santa Claus. Peter, you pass the pencils,

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WHEN THE MOON CAME UP THEY WENT TO THE GREEN BANK'S BEHIND THE HAWTHORN AND SCOOPED UP A PAILFUL OF THE WONDERFUL WATER

A Book for Jerry

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please, and Katinka may distribute the papers. And you must all tell Santa just what you want, and don't forget commas and periods. Santa Claus is very partial to commas and periods. Last week Katinka wrote a whole page without a single comma. I can't think what made her.

Katinka, who was passing papers, blushed guiltily, and Jerry, though he hated girls, felt a little sorry for her. Katinka was hardly as odious as most girls. She had reddish short curls and she wore green butterflyes on them. She was fattish, her face was usually sticky from lollipops, her aprons were always torn and dirty, but even she switched herself around a good deal;

couldn't help it, being a girl, Jerry supposed. And once she had stopped in front of Jerry's house to pat Mutt with a grimy, affectionate paw.

Well, Jerry wrote his letter. He knew precisely what he wanted. So he told Santa Claus all about it, told him about the dragons and pirates and lions and soldiers he wanted in the book, mentioned the blue cover, explained the size, called Santa's attention to his record as a good boy all year, and stated that there must be no girls in the book. Then he went over the letter, scattering commas and periods lavishly in every sentence, and signed his name, Jerry Juddikins, 123 Whippoorwill Road. As Jerry watched it go up the chimney, he felt a tug at his heart; he had never quite felt before; he would get his precious book on Christmas morning; Santa Claus would see to that.

DENJAMIN BOOKFELLOW came into his workshop the next morning rubbing his hands and telling himself what a really fine job he had in the world, anyway. To live in the North Country with Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus and all the Toymakers, to write books all year long for children's Christmas stockings—what could be finer than that, as said Benjamin Bookfellow of himself. Most of all, he thought, he liked this cozy room of his where the sun shone in so gayly and the Plot Tree, thick with plots for stories, reared its beautiful branches over his head. Benjamin Bookfellow was very happy that morning as he settled down to Page Twenty-four of Chief Thundercloud's Revenge, a book he was writing for a little tomboy of a girl, named Katinka, who liked Indian stories almost as much as she liked lollipops, which was saying a good deal.

Pretty soon Hickey-Stickety came in. Hickey-Stickety was the postmaster of the Claus establishment. He had a letter in his hand and he looked worried. "Santy Claus sent ye this here," he began. "It's from a boy as goes to the Peppermint Place school. He wants a queer thing, he do. He wants a book as hasn't got no girls in it."

Benjamin Bookfellow reached out for the letter. "Pyrits," it said, "soldieries, druggens"; all that was easy. "no, girls, in it Santa Claus not, onc." A book without girls in it? Benjamin Bookfellow had never heard of such a thing. Girls were absolutely necessary to books. Dragons had to eat them, knights had to rescue them; how could you possibly have a book without a girl in it?

AND yet maybe the Plot Tree would have that kind of story on it after all. Benjamin reached up and picked off a luscious fruit. He opened it carefully and out fell the plot, a little round ball with words written all over it. He read it hastily. No, here was a girl right off, a girl and a snome and a prince, quite obviously a fairy story.

He pulled down another plot, then more plots and more plots and more plots, cut them open and took out the round ball and still not a single story without a girl in it, just as he had feared. Poor Benjamin Bookfellow! His face was as long as your arm.

At supper that night in Santa Claus' dining room, when Benjamin and Hickey-Stickety and the Twelve Toymakers were all at table with the Clauses, Santa

Claus said first thing: "Well, Bookfellow, and did you find a story without a girl in it?"

"I didn't, sir," replied Benjamin sadly. "I took off every single plot from the tree, and they all had girls in them."

Santa Claus' rosy chops fell. "Have you called in the Authors, Bookfellow?" Santa Claus wanted to know.

Benjamin Bookfellow knew that was coming. The Authors sometimes wrote books to help Benjamin when he got crowded with work.

"No, sir, I haven't yet." "Then do send for them immediately," said Santa Claus. "We must get Jerry Juddikins' book, you know, at any cost."

THE next morning Santa Claus sent the remainder down to the edge of the North Country to meet the Authors, while Benjamin Bookfellow fidgeted and fussed around his study.

At last they came, a whole sleighful—stylish authors, down-to-the-hel authors, shy authors, important authors, authors with fur overcoats, authors with no overcoats, lady authors twittering, authors, authors, authors. But the interview was short. Not a single author could even imagine a book without a girl in it, much less produce one.

"I give it up," said Benjamin Bookfellow. "Jerry Juddikins will just have to take a regular book, a book with girls in it, and try to be contented with it."

So he set to work on all the other books he had to finish before Christmas. Whereupon he discovered, to his horror and dismay, that there wasn't a plot in the place. He had plucked them yesterday and laid them on his work table, and now they were gone, every single one of them, gone. Benjamin Bookfellow, in great agitation, looked high and low for his plots, in every corner and crevice. He moved the furniture and looked behind the pictures.

And then Benjamin Bookfellow knew the worst. The Authors had stolen his plots, and now he couldn't write his Christmas books. With a groan Benjamin Bookfellow sank in his chair.

GREAT was the sorrow of jolly old Santa Claus and great was the sorrow of Mrs. Claus and the Twelve Toymakers when they learned the dreadful news. No Christmas books for children! What a terrible thing!

Well, there they were, Santa Claus and all his helpers, with Christmas not two weeks off, and no books for children's stockings. Oh, there were some books of course. Benjamin Bookfellow had been writing books all year long, but there was no book for Katinka, for hers was only half finished; and there was no book for Jerry Juddikins, who didn't want anything but a book for Christmas.

Santa Claus thought maybe the Plot Tree would grow some new plots for the rest of the books, but Benjamin Bookfellow said no. There were some buds on the trees, but you can't expect buds to be fruit in a week.

"Perhaps if you watered it an extra lot the plots would grow," said Santa Claus at dinner next day.



"Perhaps if you pruned it —" began Toymaker Number Five, but that was no good either; the Plot Tree had been beautifully pruned just a few weeks before and now was a marvel of perfect branches and healthy sap.

"Did you ever try using a little imagination on it?" asked Toymaker Number Eleven timidly. Everybody stared.

"What's imagination?" asked Hicketty-Sticketty.

"Why —" commenced Santa Claus and stopped.

"Why —" began Mrs. Claus and stopped.

"Why —" Benjamin Bookfellow started and stopped.

So Toymaker Number Eleven finished up for them.

"Why, Hicketty-Sticketty," he said in a little thin voice, "if you think up a lovely story that never happened, but is better than anything that ever did happen, that's imagination. There's a spring," he added dreamily, "where the waters of imagination grow. I know where that spring is."

"You do?" everybody at the table cried.

"YES," answered Toymaker Number Eleven, still in the same musing voice.

"It's in the deep woods down between green banks. Even in winter the banks are green; the snow melts when it touches them. A hawthorn tree almost hides the spring from view, but at night when the moon is shining you can see the water quite plainly; it's silver and black and it sings a little song."

"Well," boomed Santa Claus in a big voice, "that solves the whole thing. To-night we'll get some of that wonderful water, and sprinkle it on the Plot Tree and then it will burst forth with plots and Bookfellow can write his books."

Which is just what happened. When the moon came up that night Benjamin Bookfellow, led by Toymaker Number Eleven, went in the deep woods down to the green banks behind the hawthorn, scooped up a pailful of the wonderful water and took it back to the Plot Tree. At the first sprinkle the buds began to flower; at the next sprinkle the flowers bloomed into green fruit; at the last sprinkle the green fruit turned yellow like oranges and seemed ready to burst. Three sprinkles, and the buds were full grown plots, ready to be nipped off by Benjamin Bookfellow and used for children's books. A wonderful thing, imagination. Nobody ever need scoff at it again.

But still Jerry Juddikins' book was not forthcoming, for even the new plots all had girls in them. Jerry didn't know he wouldn't get his book course. He didn't dream that in all the store of Santa's treasures there wouldn't be a book without a girl in it. So he was very happy.

IT WAS in the evening of two days before Christmas, and already the air of Christmas was abroad. The air crackled with Christmas, the windows of people's houses flaunted Christmas, the snow crunched with Christmas in every crunch, and everywhere there was that tingling feel of Christmas. Even Mutt had Christmas in his bones and had gone off on an adventure, tail up, nose up, barking with Christmas joy. And then to cap the climax, Mr. Juddikins came home with a job in his pocket! Oh such joy in the Juddikins house! They were all quite delicious with it.

They wished Mutt would come back though. They knew how happy he would be when they told him. Mr. Juddikins hurried out and bought a fat bone for him, such a bone as Mutt had dreamed of all his life but had never yet set teeth upon. They unbolted the door, the mutt quickly to open it when Mutt came back. Then they sat down and waited, the bone on a plate, the door unlatched.

But Mutt did not come back. Six o'clock came, and half-past eight and nine. The Juddikins went out into the snow-covered garden calling, "Mutt,

Mutt, Mutt." They went up and down Whippoorwill Road hunting and calling and searching. But he was gone, and they sat around the fire, Mr. Juddikins and Mrs. Juddikins and Jerry, with terror and ache in their hearts. Even the baby looked sad as she slept in her high chair.

Then, all at once, as they sat there, they heard steps up the walk; not dog steps but human steps, a big, long stride like a man's and a little, short hippetty-hop like a girl's. A knock came at the door, a big rap from a man's hand, a little tattoo from a girl's hand. Mr. Juddikins looked fearfully at Mrs. Juddikins, and Jerry looked at them both. Here was somebody to tell them Mutt was dead. They couldn't move. The knock came again.

"Go," said Mrs. Juddikins to Mr. Juddikins.

MR. JUDDIKINS went, and in turned a bundle of red curls, sticky lips, smeared hands, torn coat. It was Katinka. At her heels followed a tall black overcoat with a kind face; Katinka's father.

"He's all right, Jerry!" cried Katinka, falling into the room. "Mutt's right! He's just a little hurt, and he's asleep now by our fire. I wrapped his leg up and gave him an enormous supper."

Katinka's father spoke next, smiling kindly. "Your dog had a little accident, Mr. Juddikins," he said.

Accident! Jerry turned white, and Katinka struck in again. "But he's quite all right, Jerry. He gave me the sweetest looks when I was fixing his leg, and we'll bring him home in the morning."

Then Katinka's father explained to the amazed and bewildered Juddikins what had happened. "It was about seven o'clock," he said, "and the butcher boy was hurrying his horse down the road, to get home to his supper, I suppose. We heard the horse; he was going like lightning. Katinka was in the yard, and the next thing my wife and I knew was a noise in the road. Katinka was screaming, a dog was yelping. It was your dog, Mr. Juddikins. He had run in front of the cart, and Katinka had run in front of it, too, and had scratched the dog from the horses' feet." He looked at Katinka with the proudest eyes. "She really saved him from being killed, I think."

KATINKA had saved Mutt from being killed! That little girl with her sticky hands had run right under the horses' hoofs and brought their Mutt to safety. The Juddikins couldn't speak. Their hearts seemed to choke into their very mouths; but they looked at her as if she were something holy.

Katinka started for the door. "It's all right now," she said. "I wanted you to know. Oh, he's a darling dog, Jerry. And his leg is only cut a little because I had to throw him, and he hit the curb."

"And weren't you hurt?" asked Mr. Juddikins, the first word any of them had spoken.

"Me? Oh, no. I never got hurt," answered Katinka loftily, and made for the door.

The next morning Santa Claus received the most surprising letter. He thought it was too late for Christmas letters, but here came one on this the very day before Christmas. It was from Jerry Juddikins, and it was written in the wildest haste. You could tell that by the handwriting. It said:

Dear Santa Claus: I, love girls now, please, please, put a girl just like Katinka in my book.

So Benjamin Bookfellow wrote all morning and all afternoon, a beautiful blue book with pirates and dragons and soldiers in it, and a heroine who was just like Katinka, and that night Santa Claus took it to Whippoorwill Road and put it in Jerry's stocking.

And every day after that Jerry carried his precious book under his arm, and every night he slept with it under his pillow, and he was the happiest boy in the whole world and Katinka was his best friend.