

## A Traveller's Christmas Story

By Sophia Sears

Once upon a Christmas Eve, there lived a young woman in a small cottage with her mother who had been struck sorrowfully ill. The lady should have left her mother's small country estate many Christmases ago but she had remained to care for her ailing mother. During those years, it was only the young woman who worked and toiled on the farm. Her build grew strong and tall and her mind learned to wander beautifully. Her imagination swept her feet to the cobblestone wall encircling the estate, just so she could climb up and sit on top of that wall. She would then sigh and watch the geese chase the setting sun, and she'd dream of the day her feet could touch the other side of the wall.

As summer drew to a close and the first autumn chill settled in the wind and amongst the golden leaves, the young lady's mother took a turn for the worse. The only tonic that would aid her mother came from a special recipe the young lady had learned in the market from an Indian trader; the potion called for tea leaves boiled with milk, sugar, and cardamom.

However as the days went by, the young woman found it harder and harder to resist her peeks through the stone wall at the meadow beyond. She felt the yearning to explore the wide world beating faster and faster within her breast like a dove's wing. As fate would cruelly have it, her mother passed away that Christmas Eve and into the loving hands of the Holy ghost.

The young woman wept and grieved for her mother throughout that eve and night. As the candles dwindled down, the dawn of Christmas day began to glow upon the horizon, and the young woman looked up from her mother's bedside at that bright dawn, a fervent earnestness arising in her eyes.

Pressing her hand in farewell against her mother's grave, the young woman pulled on her pack and headed towards the gate in the stone wall. She paused, and then turned back to that ledge she had so often sat upon. Throwing her pack over the wall, she hiked up her dress and climbed onto the wall. Throwing her arms wide, the

young woman leapt and flew from the cobblestone wall, leaving behind her home on Christmas Day to have her adventure.

The young woman traversed far and wide across the vast and fantastical World she's only heard about from traders and books. While crossing the South Seas, she sailed on a junk under lyrical constellations that danced in the sky all day and all night. As she traversed over snowy mountain peaks, she burrowed her hands into the fur of alpacas and felt the stiff wool against her skin. She lounged inside an extravagant velvet train laced with silver as she journeyed across the vast plains of the Continent. She rode an elephant through the treacherous jungles in the East, where she single-handedly documented the behavioral patterns of the native peoples. When she had to trek across sun-kissed sand dunes, she purchased a camel that she rode while chasing the jasmine wind.

In the desert palace where jasmine was first born, the young lady dined on whipped pastries stuffed with dates and honey. On a stormy night in the misty moors, she ate lamb braised in sherry and rosemary before a blazing fire, safely sheltered behind stone walls. In a castle by an emerald and sapphire seashore, she dined on butterflied lobster brushed with butter and orange zest. Under the Arabian sky, she ventured a taste of scorpion dipped in buttermilk and cornmeal, fried in hot oil.

In the tropical rainforests, she communed with tribal shamans and channeled her inner consciousness. She wrote down the oral legends of gypsies who were driving a caravan across the shadowy gullies. On white sandy beaches blessed with the touch of lilting palm trees, she danced around gigantic bonfires made of red flames and transcendent desire. She deciphered ancient scrollwork on blue stones she discovered on a small island caught in a frozen sea. She talked to a wise man who dwelled within a small, but mystical hut that was hidden by the tall iridescent reeds of a swamp.

Ever farther did the young woman travel, and ever more did she learn and grow in body, mind, and spirit. Those that had once known the daughter of the ailing farmer's widow would not now recognize the vibrant, intelligent, and mindfully matured woman that she had become.

But sorrow had begun to creep like frost around her heart, and she realized that even with all the wonders she had encountered, had shared, had loved... there was still

a sore emptiness that could not be filled. So the young lady began pursuing the one thing utterly beyond her reach.

The horizon.

She chased it for many moons and suns, ever growing, ever learning, but never filling that innermost part of her.

The seasons came to a rest as the white ice of winter settled like heavenly clouds upon all the lands. As the days grew shorter and shorter, and the holly berries grew more glossy and red, the young woman found herself looking upon a familiar, but long forgotten sight. Her mother's farm cottage lay nestled in the snow, its windows aglow and with dusky purple smoke rising from its chimney. The young lady had traveled there and back again, returning from whence she went.

She walked up to the Christmas wreath on the front door, and tapped the brass knocker. The door was soon opened by a beaming face. Behind that face was another, and another, and another, until she could no longer count, and all of the faces were lit up with Christmas cheer, for it was Christmas Eve.

The smiling eyes and laughing voices raised in merriment drew the young lady into the home, in a way she had never experienced before. For the people around her were none other than her passed mother's estranged, but beloved, family. Glasses clinked and rose with the music, and couples kissed under archways covered in mistletoe. As the young lady milled around her family, she saw an old man sitting in a rocking chair wrapped up in an old quilt. She walked up to the Sage of Christmas Past, and sat at his side.

"Could I pose a rather complicated and confusing question to you, Wise Sir?" she asked.

"Only," the old man said, chuckling, "if you do not call me 'wise.' True I am old, but I am learning to this very day. I expect I will learn something from you, too, in a moment." The old man's eyes twinkled up at her through his bushy eyebrows.

The young woman sat back, and softly said, "I am much travelled, my good sir. Far more so than many a common man, or woman, or even an uncommon one. I have seen and learned so much, I've transcended barriers and what I considered my own being, yet why is there a hesitancy, a doubt, within my deepest self? None can explain

it.” The woman snorted frustrated, before leaning forward with a plea in her eyes. “I hope one such as you, with your vast knowledge and years of experience, can answer me this. What do I miss?”

“My lady, you come to this house and realize it is not made of gold or marble, nor brick or straw. For this is not a house, it is your *home*. And you felt the doubt lessen as you came home. As you came a little back to yourself.” The old man paused, looked deep into her eyes, and said, “My child, you have always searched for answers. You believed that to search meant to go beyond the border of the cobblestone wall. You believed you had to look outside yourself to find yourself. But look around you,” he stated, gesturing widely at her family sharing in the love of Christmas merriment. “This is love. The love for yourself is that which you still doubt, and it is also which only you can find. The answer to your quest, is found within you.”

“This insight my child,” the old man said, “ is my Christmas gift to you.”

