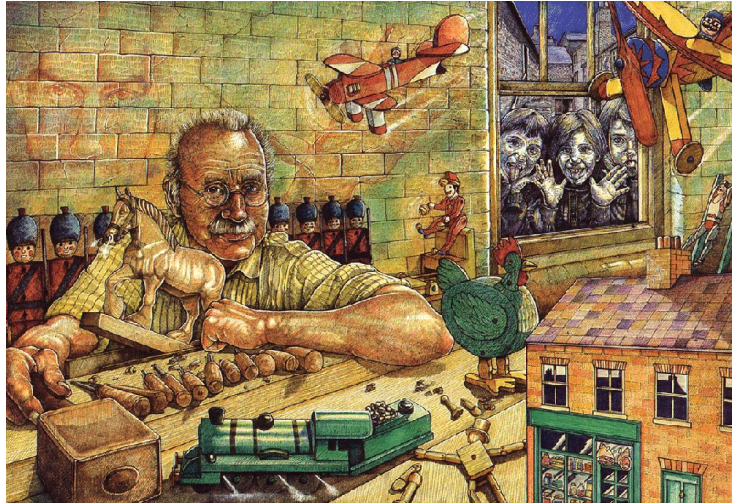


The Mystical Toymaker

By Sophia Sears



Once upon a time, there lived a kind old toymaker whose toys could dance and sing. He would carve little ballerinas that'd dance on top of music boxes, teddy bears that would hug, balls that would never stop bouncing, and dolls that would play tea. He built twinkling ice skates made from icing, prancing toy horses made of glass, and play blocks that would build themselves into splendid castles.

When it was a child's Birth Day, all the little boys and girls would write a wish list to give to the mystical toymaker. It was a tradition in the quaint country town that on a child's Birth Day, the children would be given their new presents from the toymaker.

But this toymaker added a little extra magic to his presents.

For he had the true giving Spirit, and could see into the warm hearts of the children to build them presents that they would forever love. Needless to say, all of his Birth Day presents were beloved by all the children, and yet, he never once gave a gift that a child had asked for. Instead, the toymaker would surprise the children year after year with their own perfect gift for he could see into the children's hearts and what they truly loved. It was this look into their golden hearts that made each of the toymaker's gifts so magical.

One year, on the morn of Timothy's Birth Day, the little boy came to give his list to the kind old toymaker. Without so much as a knock, the boy rudely entered the shop, and upon seeing the toymaker, addressed him thus: "I have brought my Birth Day list, Toymaker! Mum tells me to thank you for last year's present— which I really did like! But this year I want a red bicycle. Or a wooden train that whistles! I don't understand why you don't make me what I ask!"

Timothy said all of this in a very whiny manner, to which the toymaker's eyebrow rose in response.

Then the toymaker slowly lumbered across the cinnamon-smelling shop cluttered with sparking odds and ends, and kneeled gently at the boy's feet. "Hand me your Birth Day list, child," the old man said.

Timothy looked into the old man's twinkling eyes, and suddenly felt guilty as he drew the list from his trouser pocket. The old man straightened the spectacles on his crooked nose and peered down at the list. He then peered up from under his bushy eyebrows at the little boy, and Timothy began to squirm.

The toymaker chuckled, and handed the list back to the boy. "If you want me to make you a toy, your list has to have the right one."

He then ushered the boy out of the shop, and told him to come back when the boy had realized what his right gift was.

So Timothy wandered around the village, writing list after list of the things he wanted for his Birth Day. But every time he brought a list to the wise toymaker, the old man would tell him he'd not yet discovered his true gift for this year, and he'd tell the boy to think of something else.

After the fifth list, the little boy finally whined, "What does it matter? Why can't you make a gift from the things I *want*?"

To which, the old man said, "Look deeper. Deeper than the snow blanketing the pine trees. Deeper than the red glow of holly berries. Deeper than the crackling of a Yule log. Look deeper, and you will find your true Birth Day gift."

So Timothy once again struck out to find his true Birth Day gift, but as dusk began to fall, and the toymaker refused once again to build a toy from his list, the boy felt discouraged and headed for home. Outside the village, Timothy came upon a girl wearing an old frock and playing with a ragged, homemade doll in front of her family's rundown house. The boy stopped to watch as the girl's little sister waddled down the rickety porch steps surrounded by vibrant crimson poppies that stood out like rubies against the snow. The little girl joined her older sister and tried to grab the doll from her arms.

The older girl cried, "Careful! We have only this one dolly!"

Then the older sister knelt, and gingerly offered the doll to her sister. The little sister snatched it to her chest.

"It took me a long time to sew it," the older sibling went on, "we need to be gentle with it!"

As the young boy watched the two girls playing with the homemade toy, he felt warmth and joy begin to soar within his heart as he was struck by a wonderful idea. He ran back to the village to find the old toymaker closing up his shop for the eve.

"Please, Toymaker! I know what my true present is this year," Timothy said, out of breath.

The toymaker's eyes twinkled as he led the boy back into the now dimly lit shop. "So, my child," the old man asked, after taking a seat, "what do you believe is your true gift?"

"I-I would like," Timothy stammered, "for you to make two new stocking dolls for the girls down the lane. They only have a torn one to share, and I...I'd like..." The boy's voice drifted away into the falling snowflakes outside, and he stared at his feet.

The kind old toymaker smiled at the boy, his eyes sparkling, and said, "Timothy. I never build a of the toy from a Birth Day list because most children wish for something that only comes from thinking about yourself."

"What?" The boy asked, confused.

“My toys are my gifts to you. I make no profit, and am given no benefit. Or, rather, I am given only the truly wonderful happiness that comes from giving to others.”

The toymaker leaned down and beckoned the boy closer to him before whispering in his ear, “Have you not wondered why my toys have such magic? Where do you suppose the magic of Birth Days comes from?” The old man smiled. “I craft these toys with the Spirit of Giving, the true love that comes from opening our hearts to others.”

“Have I opened my heart?” the boy asked.

“Yes, my child.” The toymaker chuckled. “You opened your heart the moment you knew those girls needed a new toy more than you. That is what you needed to discover this Birth Day. The joy, and love in sharing.”

The young boy stared with wide eyes at the kind toymaker, and as the old man began leading Timothy out, the toymaker said, “Stop by their house tomorrow morn. You will be wonderfully surprised.”

With a clap on the boy’s shoulder, the toymaker locked the door and the little boy was left to walk home alone. But in his heart, his excitement glowed as he pictured the sisters’ surprise tomorrow morn.

As the sun rose higher the next day, the boy threw on some warm mittens and a scarf and sprung out of the house. He ran through the snow to the girls’ house, and when he arrived, the sisters were walking down the porch steps to pick up the wrapped gifts curiously.

Timothy watched with glee as the girls unwrapped the two dolls, and the sisters laughed and giggled as one doll stood up and curtsied. A second doll began parading about wearing a tall top hat.

It was just then that the little sister spotted the boy hiding behind the fence. The little girl got up and waddled over to the young boy.

“Do you want to play with us?” she asked.

Timothy looked up to see the older sister smiling as she offered him one of the stocking dolls. From that day forward, those two sisters remained his best friends.