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STORIES AND POEMS
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THE SAINT AND THE SERPENT

In far-off times there lived a boy. His name was Golden-Heart. He was a fine looking lad, blue-eyed, fair-haired.

One day, he noticed something strange lying on the ground outside his father's house. "It looks like a huge rope, in coils, and yet ...?" questioned he, and came a little nearer. It moved slightly. Golden-Heart called to his parents to come and look too. "Why," they whispered, for fear of waking it, "it's a serpent, albeit a fine one. Who would have thought of such a creature landing here! "Ah," continued the boy's father and mother, "today is All Hallow's E'en, when anything might happen, and anything might appear." "What," asked Golden-Heart, "does 'hallow' mean?" "It means what is revered, made holy. It is the eve before All Saints Day, the day of all saintly people." "O," murmured the boy. While talking the little family had withdrawn into the house, but now when they looked out of the window, the great Serpent had gone. "Stay in, dear child," pleaded his parents; "before the Day of Saints comes the night of dark deeds." But outside it was a golden late October afternoon. Every leaf shone in its glow; Golden-Heart wondered where that snaky creature had taken itself. He slipped out of the simple wooden cottage, ran swiftly along the woodland path leading to the foothills of the mountains. There he saw a strange sight. Rearing up from a



large flat slab of grey stone, like a vast pillar of burnished copper and glowing orange as flames of fire, something stretched upwards to the sky, beyond the trees Golden-Heart had just left behind him, higher than the hills, almost to the mountains themselves. Suddenly, a mighty voice out of the clouds spoke: "Go back to earth." The shining pillar-like object immediately grew shorter, reddish-purple in colour. To the boy's fascinated and awed gaze, it seemed to grow broader and rounder until, greenish coil upon

coil settled one upon another and to Golden-Heart's amazement there lay what he had sought - the Serpent! A large drop of water splashed over the edge of the slab of rock filling to overflowing the deep chalice of a half-opened autumn crocus. "Are you in trouble?" asked Golden-Heart. "Yes-...-..." sighed the great creature, and the soft hiss of his voice

echoed on in the hills, long after he had spoken. Anyone else might have been filled with fear, but the boy was interested more than anything else. He thought the Snake looked really magnificent, lying there, his scaly skin shining silver in the last rays of the evening sun.

"I wish I knew something," sighed the boy. "What is it?" asked the Serpent. "Are there two kinds of knowing? about what I can see and about what I cannot see? How do I love what I cannot behold? I want to find the answer to this question." "And mine is," slowly replied the creature, "when shall I be allowed to reach the heavenly heights?" Neither could answer the other's question. At length, the Serpent said, "Of all nights this is the one in which to receive answers about the future." "From whom?" queried the boy. "From the Saintly Hermit." "Where does he live?" "In an awkward, very awkward place to reach." "O, can we try?" cried Golden-Heart. The Serpent was so long answering that he thought he was never going to speak. Finally he said, "Yes, we will both go to the Saintly Hermit with our questions. But, why are you not afraid of me? Most people are." "Why should I be?" promptly replied the boy; you belong to God's earth as much as I do. Besides, you look beautiful, especially your fiery red ruby eyes." "There will be dangers and difficulties," warned the creature. "I trust in you," answered Golden-Heart simply. "But, I will run home and tell my parents what I am going to do." He found his parents just leaving home to look for him, so that, when he said he was about to be off again, they were rather dismayed. But they had long become accustomed to their son's fearless and purposeful nature. All they said was, "We will watch for your safe return." They trusted in the helpful spirits around their son.

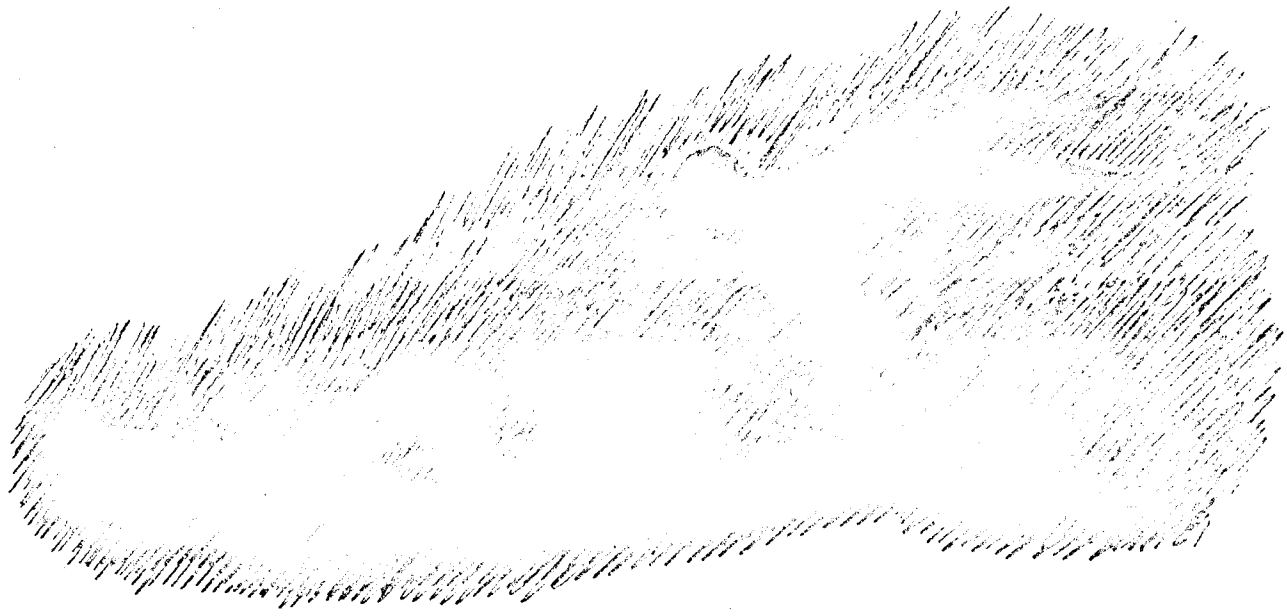
Off set Golden-Heart to where he had left the Serpent. He was full of excited anticipation. They set off together, his great companion grumbling, "The dark spirits will be a nuisance tonight and may obstruct our path. Still, they don't particularly like me, but they might be impertinent to you, Boy. Keep close, always, to me." Now, a mist fell, so that they could scarcely see their path; fortunately the snake's eyes shone like lamps. Every now and again, black shapes swept across their way, or flew around them as if they would hold them prisoner. Once, Golden-Heart seemed to be almost carried off his feet, to the accompaniment of harsh, piercing yells. Suddenly, a stillness descended, for it was late, nearing mid-night. All Saints Day was approaching. The fog lifted, the moon shone in all her brilliance. "Now comes the most difficult part of our journey," remarked the Serpent. "Why," asked Golden-Heart. "There is an abyss, a chasm, to cross. The Saintly Hermit lives in his cell the other side of it." The creature let out a prolonged breath, sounding like a thousand sighs. On all sides, great boulders of rock loomed

in the moonlight, assuming strange shapes. It was called The Pass of the Giants. Golden-Heart felt very small, as he walked through this place. Higher still, the mountains reared their peaks to the night sky. Presently, the boulders lessened. The way widened and suddenly the two travellers stood almost on the edge of a great, wide, deep gorge. Even the Serpent recoiled slightly. "Look!" exclaimed the boy, "I see a faint light on the other side." "Yes," replied the creature, "it glimmers from the Saintly Hermit's cell; no ordinary light though: it is the holy light that surrounds such men. Let us rest a little." Each was glad to remain still for a short while. Golden-Heart's gaze took in the wideness of the abyss. "How can we possibly cross?" "I will



be the bridge, on which you shall cross." "Ah, dear Serpent, how wonderfully strong and kind you are!" "Before I do this," spoke the great creature, "may I ask you a favour?" "O, yes," quickly replied the boy. "Please, I want to change my name. One letter will do it. I have always admired so much the mountain eagle poised for flight, with his wings making a great 'V'. Place it in the middle of my name, instead of 'P', and I will become ..." " 'SERVENTE', which means servant," cried Golden-Heart. "Now," said Servente, "my task begins." With these words he gathered himself together to cast his length across the chasm, but, he only reached halfway. With his strong muscles he pulled himself back. The next time, rearing vertically, he made a mighty effort to reach the other

side, but his length fell short a man's height from the other side. The boy looked on and shivered a little when he thought of crossing the deep gorge on so narrow a bridge, almost a tight-rope. Servente turned to him. "Brave boy, this time I shall accomplish it. Look neither to the right nor the left, but straight ahead; you will come safely over." Once more, the great creature gathered up all his strength and spanned the abyss to his utmost length. The bridge was made. Golden-Heart walked fearlessly across on the body of his friend. Beneath his feet he felt deep vibrations beneath the scales, after such strenuous effort as the snake had made. "O, Servente! thank you," exclaimed the boy when he reached the other side. He expected the Serpent to somehow bring the rest of his body over so that they could go together to the Hermit with their questions. But the creature did not move; with his tail wound many times round a tree on the far side, and his head resting on the grass on the opposite edge, he remained motionless, but for a slight swaying from side to side, like some suspension bridge. "Aren't you coming?" called Golden-Heart, with disappointment in his voice. "No, for if I do you might not get back again. Take my question for me, and bring back the answer." So Golden-Heart went on alone, towards a small archway in a rock; for a window, a roughly hewn opening. Through it, he saw an old man on his knees, deep in prayer. His scant silver hair fell to his shoulders, which were covered by a coarse, woven garment. Golden-Heart stood at the entrance to the cell, not wishing to disturb the Saint. The moon was now far down in the sky and the first light of the eastern dawn fell on the old man's face. This seemed to rouse him. He stood up, turned round and, perceiving the boy, said, "What is it?" The question came. Are there two kinds of knowing? about what can be seen with the eyes and about what cannot be seen? "Yes, and when the outer eye serves the inner eye and the inner the outer, there will be one knowledge." The Hermit looked deep into the boy's eyes and saw there in them another question. But before Golden-Heart had pronounced it, the answer came! "When you can love, you will see." "And now please, holy Saint, my friend Servente, wishes an answer to his question, which:- "When shall I return to the heights?" The answer came:- "He is there now." Greatly wondering, the boy took his leave of the Hermit. Hurrying a little, he retraced his steps to the spot by the edge of the gorge where he had safely landed and where he expected to find the Serpent or Servente as he was now called. But the great creature was gone! The chasm lay deep and unbridged. Golden-Heart was filled with dismay, until he saw, where Servente's head had rested, a magnificent mountain eagle. The bird was looking down intently at two shining objects on the ground.



The Serpent's eyes still seeming to glow; all that was left of him - "Ah," said the eagle, "I shall take them and place them on the highest peak; but first I will carry you back to the other side of the chasm." Golden-Heart settled himself safely between the eagle's wings; the bird rose into the keen air and bore him swiftly across, landing smoothly and gently on the sandy edge. "I saw it happen," began relating the eagle; "your friend Servente had grown so far, stretched so mightily that he had surpassed himself, as he bridged the gulf. Then suddenly, he fell into a thousand pieces which fell, glittering mildly into the valley below. Fare thee well, Golden-Hearted boy."

Thanking the eagle, Golden-Heart turned towards his home, walking slowly and thoughtfully, locking in his heart the answers to his questions, and filled with gratitude for Servente's great deed of sacrifice for him. He hardly noticed that he was once more in the Pass of the Giants, every rock and boulder bathed in the rosy light of the rising sun. This time the landscape looked warm and friendly. Two figures came in sight. "O, my parents," fell from the boy's lips. Soon mother, father and son were together; as they walked home, Golden-Heart related his experiences. Once, he turned, looked back, and up to the far mountains where the sun's rays struck the highest peak. Did he see? Yes, he was sure he saw there, ruby red sparkles glinting in the sunshine, like a beacon fire.

ADVENT

Winter is dark
But each tiny spark
Brightens the way-
To Christmas Day

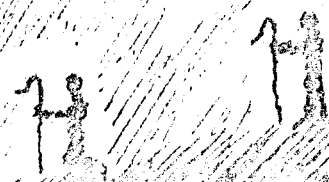
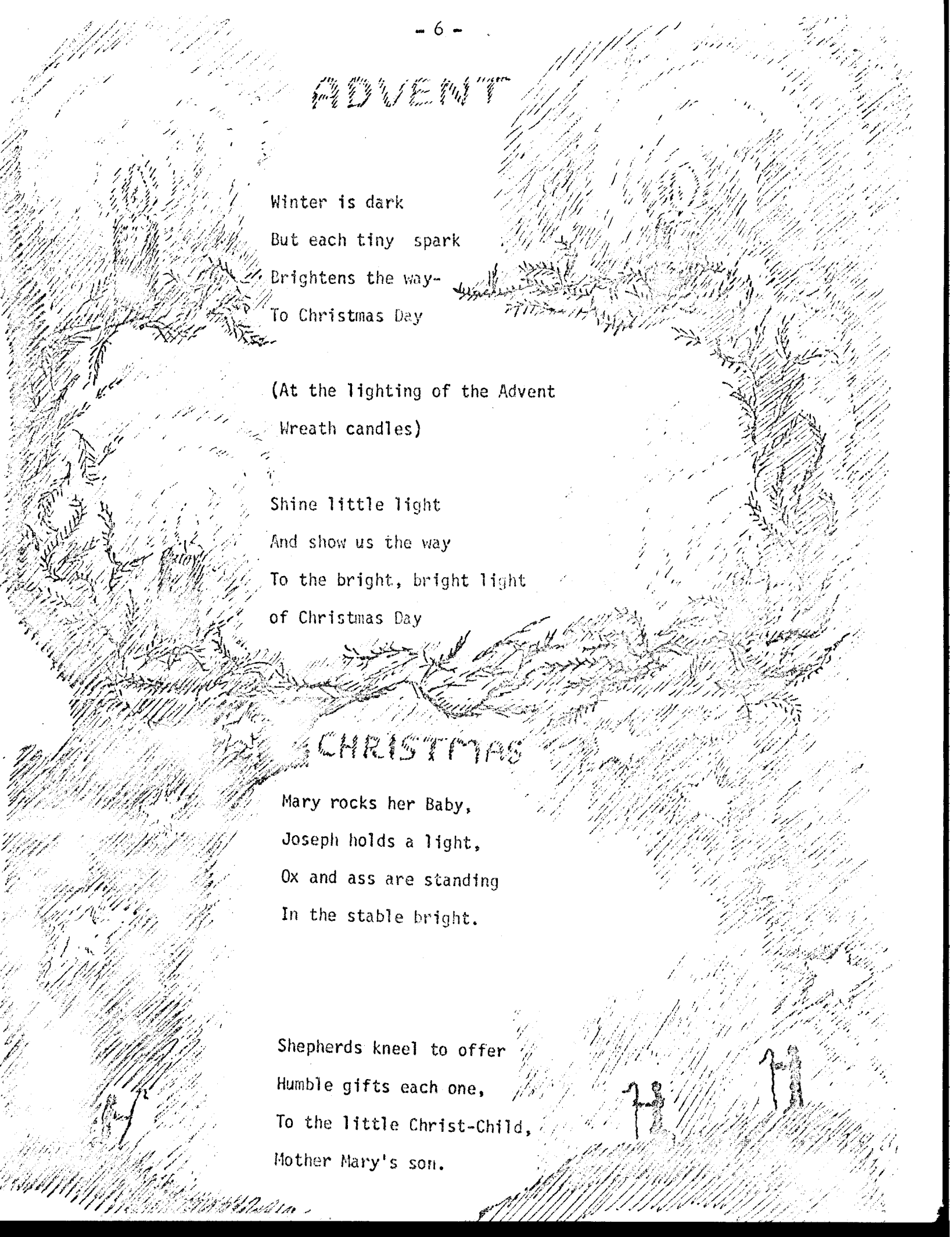
(At the lighting of the Advent
Wreath candles)

Shine little light
And show us the way
To the bright, bright light
of Christmas Day

CHRISTMAS

Mary rocks her Baby,
Joseph holds a light,
Ox and ass are standing
In the stable bright.

Shepherds kneel to offer
Humble gifts each one,
To the little Christ-Child,
Mother Mary's son.

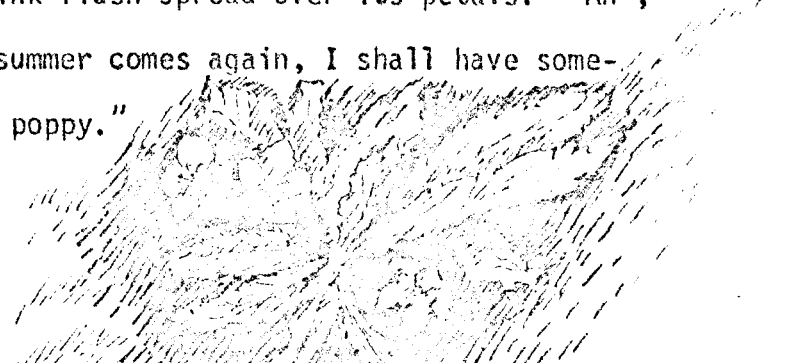
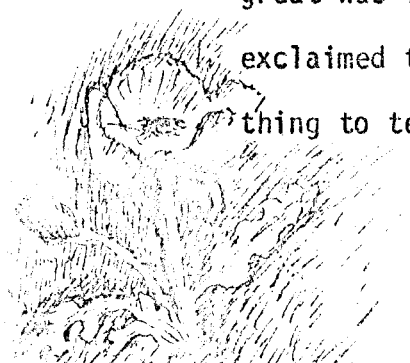


Amongst flowers in a garden grew a plant. It was summer time so many other plants near it turned their blooms to the sun; blue, yellow, violet and all colours, But this plant only bore leaves -many of them. Its neighbour, a tall red poppy, looked down at it and asked, "When are your flowers coming?" The plant could only answer, "I don't really know, but I hope one day." "Well", replied the poppy, "you had better hurry up, for the summer does not last for ever". And indeed, the warm days passed away, the garden lost its colours, the trees shed their leaves and winter came with frost and cold.

The plant tucked itself up, but it could not sleep like the others in the garden because it felt excited - it was growing a stem ! Then came a bud, a white one !

It was near Christmas and it began to snow, so hard, that a white cover hid the plant, but every little snow-flake whispered to it, "Do not mind, you will come through." So the plant remained quiet. Every day, though, its white bud grew larger and it said to itself, "But, if I have a flower, who will see it?" Next day, the sun shone for a little while, melting away some of the snow. The plant began to open its bud, then stopped, and shivered. That night, a bright star shone down on the plant, and spoke to it, saying, "Have courage: It is Holy Night, the Saviour child is born. No frost shall wither thee, no cold shall harm thee: thou shalt be called the Christmas Rose, for thy petals are pure, and white as a lamb, thy heart is gold as the sun.

In the morning, Christmas Day, the plant bore a beautiful flower. So great was its joy that a delicate pink flush spread over its petals. "Ah", exclaimed the Christmas Rose "when summer comes again, I shall have something to tell my neighbour, the red poppy."



WANDERER'S LULLABY

Lulla, lulla lullaby,
Little baby, close your eye
See the sun is in the West,
A little bird flies to his nest.

Lulla, lulla, lullaby,
Little baby, sleep is nigh,
Now and then a tiny breeze
Whispers secrets in the trees.

You and I must wander far
Under sun and moon and star,
In the darkness of the night
Silvery beams our only light.

Lulla, lulla, lullaby,
Little baby, sleep has come,
And a friendly roof above,
Gives us shelter, food & love.