

## The Christmas Story

by Thornton W. Burgess

That was a never to be forgotten summer to Tuktu and Aklak. A ship came in the harbor near which they were camped, and they had a chance to see how the white men lived on the ship and all the wonders that the ship contained. One of the white men spent much time at their camp asking through one of the herders, who could speak his language, all sorts of questions, questions that made Tuktu and Aklak think that he knew very little. But then when they in their turn began asking questions, he told them such wonderful things that they began to think that they knew very little.

One day, as he sat watching Tuktu and her mother, Navaluk, making a coat—with a hood attached, trimmed with a fringe of wolverine fur around the edge—he told them stories, and the story that he told of Christmas was the story that Tuktu liked best of all. She told it to Aklak.

“What do you think, Aklak?” she said. “The children outside of our beautiful Northland have no reindeer. Most of them have never seen a reindeer.”

“What drags their sleds then, dogs?” demanded the practical Aklak.

“No,” replied Tuktu, “they have other animals called horses. But they cannot be beautiful like our deer, for they have no antlers. But all those children have heard of our reindeer, Aklak, and there is a certain time in the winter called Christmas when in the night after every one is asleep, there comes the children’s saint and visits each home. And, Aklak, he comes with reindeer!”

Aklak looked up quickly. “The Good Spirit?” he cried.

Tuktu’s eyes were shining as she nodded. “It must be,” she said, “for who else would have reindeer? And, listen, Aklak: he is short and round and shakes when he laughs; and he has a white beard and a fur-trimmed coat and a fur-trimmed hat; and his reindeer take him right up on the roofs of the houses; and then he takes a pack on his back and goes right down the chimney; and he leaves gifts for little children while they are asleep. And if any little boy or little girl lies awake and peeps and tries to see him, he doesn’t leave any presents for that little girl or that little boy and they never do see him. When he has made his visit, he goes right up the chimney again and jumps in his sleigh and calls to his reindeer and away he goes to the next stopping place. And he makes all those visits in one night. No wonder he wants reindeer. No wonder he wants the very best reindeer.”

“But if no one ever sees him, how do they know what he looks like?” demanded practical Aklak.

“Oh,” replied Tuktu, “it is only on the night before Christmas that he never is seen. I mean he is never seen coming down the chimney and putting the gifts for the children where they will find them. But he is seen often going about before Christmas, for he has to find out who have been good, that they may receive presents. And the children give him letters and tell him what they want, and if they have been good, he tries to give them what they want. So he leaves the Northland early, some time before Christmas, and goes out into the Great World. Then he returns for the gifts and the night before Christmas makes that wonderful flying trip with the deer. He loves reindeer.”

“Of course he loves the reindeer!” Aklak interrupted. “How could he help loving the reindeer? Aren’t they the most important animals in all the Great World?”

“That is what I said, but the man said that horses are more important down there. I asked him if they ate the meat of the horses and he said no. And I asked him if they made clothing from the skins of the horses and he said no. He said they were important because they worked for men.”

Aklak shrugged his shoulders. “The reindeer work for men also. They carry us where we want to go. We do not have to carry food for them, for they find it for themselves. They furnish us with food and clothing and our tents. I would not for the world live down there where there are no reindeer. Did the man tell you anything else?”

Tuktu’s eyes were like stars. “Yes,” said she. “He said that all over that land at Christmas time they have beautiful green trees covered with lights at night and many shining things. And sometimes these trees are hung with presents for the boys and girls; and sometimes the Good Saint appears at one of these trees and with his own hands gives the gifts to the children. But the very day after Christmas he disappears and he is seen no more until the Christmas season comes again; and no one knows where he is. All the children wonder and wonder where he is all through the year, but they have never been able to find out.”

“Did you tell the man that we know?” Aklak asked.

Tuktu shook her head. “He wouldn’t believe,” said she. “But we do know, Aklak, for that children’s saint is the Good Spirit who lives in the Valley of the Good Spirit. Oh, Aklak, wouldn’t it be too wonderful if he would choose our deer for that marvelous Christmas journey?”

Source:

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