

The New Year's Bell

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A-ring-a-ring, ring! A-ring-a-ring, ring!

“Brother Carl, wake up! wake up! Don’t you hear the great bell? Father is ringing the New Year in, don’t you hear it, little Carl? Wake up!”

Tangled-haired little Carl sat up in bed, rubbed his eyes, and after a few winks opened them wide.

“Is it the wind, brother Hans, that sings so?”

“No, no! It is the great bell; don’t you hear it ring? It is ringing for the New Year.”

“Is father drawing the rope?” asked the little one.

“Of course he is, little Carl; he is waking up the whole world that every one may wish a ‘Happy New Year.’ Come, let us go to the window.”

And the two little fellows crept out of their warm nest onto the cold floor, and over to the window in the gable.

“Oh, see, there is father’s lantern in the steeple window!” cried Carl.

It threw its light into the frosty night; the clear stars cut sharp holes in the sky, and the air was so cold it made everything glisten.

A-ring-a-ring, ring! clanged the great bell, and little Hans and Carl knew their father’s arms were making it ring. The strokes were so strong that each one made little half-asleep Carl wink; and the stars seemed to wink back to him each time. He crept closer to Hans, and the two stood still with their arms about each other; the room was quite cold, but they did not mind it, for with each stroke the great bell seemed to ring more beautifully. It seemed so near them, as if ringing right in their ears, and the two little boys stood and listened with beating hearts.

“I saw dear father trim his lantern,” whispered Hans. “He set it near the door before we went to bed, all ready to light when the clock struck twelve. Mother said to him as he put the lantern there, ‘Ring the bell good and strong, dear father, for who knows but this year may bring the great blessing which the Christ-child promised!’ We must watch for it, little Carl.”

And the old bell seemed to speak louder and clearer to the little ones, as they eagerly listened for what it was telling.

“Father says the bell will never ring from the old tower again, for the new one is being built,” said Hans. “And what do you think, brother Carl, our dear mother wept because the old steeple must be broken down, and the dear bell, that is even now a-ringing, must be put into another great tower to ring.”

“Does the great bell know it, brother?”

“No, dear little Carl; but no matter where it is put it will always ring, and be glad to wake the village for the New Year.”

“Will we go and say good-bye to the dear old bell, brother Hans?” whispered little Carl.

“Yes, brother mine; when it is day we will go, for it has rung so many times for us.”

They crept out of the cold into their snug bed again, and the great strokes poured from the tower window long after the little curly heads were full of dreams.

“Wake up, brother Hans! there is the sun.”

This time little Carl was the first to arise. Quickly they were both dressed, and, opening their door noiselessly, they went down the narrow stairs on tiptoe, and then out into the open air.

A swift wind was blowing. It swept over the bare bushes and whirled the snow into the children’s faces, and filled their curly hair with flakes. But the sun was smiling down on them and said: “See what a beautiful day I brought for a New Year’s gift to you!”

And the little ones passed through the church door, that was always open, and into the belfry tower. They knew the way, for father had so often taken them with him.

They came to the long, dark ladder-way; but they did not mind the dark—for they knew the bell was at the top, and they bravely began to climb.

Hans had wooden shoes, so he left them at the foot of the ladder. It is so much easier to climb a ladder with bare feet. Besides, he hardly felt the cold he was such a quick and lively little boy.

Carl went ahead that brother Hans might the more easily help him. They climbed, up and up, and the brave big brother talked merrily all the time, to keep little Carl from thinking of the long, long way. Up and up they went. It became darker and darker. Little Carl led on and on, and he was glad that Hans was behind him.

All at once a bright gleam of light greeted them from above, and they knew that soon they would be with the dear old bell.

Through the opening they crept, and there the great bell hung and they stood beneath it. Hans could just touch it, and he felt its long tongue and saw the shining marks on its sides where it had struck in clanging for many, many years.

It was very cold in the belfry. Little Carl tucked his hands under his blouse and gazed at the bell, while Hans explained to him what made the music and the great tolling tones that came from it.

“The whole world loves the great bell, brother Carl,” said Hans. “Mother thinks that last night it rang in the great blessing which the Christ-child had promised.”

“What did the little Christ-child promise, brother?”

“Don’t you remember, little Carl? Mother told us that the Christ-child would send little children a beautiful gift; I think it must be the New Year that he has sent, for that is what the old bell brought to us last night.”

And Hans lifted little Carl, and he kissed the beautiful bell on its great round lip, and the bell was still warm from its long ringing.

And they stood and looked at the bell quietly for a long time. And then they said, “Good-bye, dear great bell,” and they went down the dark ladder again.

Hans put on his wooden shoes at the foot of the ladder, and with flying feet they crossed the church garden, and there stood the dear mother in the door looking for them. She had found their little bed empty, and was just starting out to find them.

“Dear Mother, we have been in the tower to thank the great bell for bringing the New Year,” cried Hans.

“Did the Christ-child send it, Mother?” asked little Carl.

The mother stooped and put her arms about them and kissed them both. As she led them into the room she said, “Yes, my little ones, the Christ-child sends the New Year.”

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