

**THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES  
OF SANTA CLAUS**



The old head drooped drowsily.

**THE LIFE AND  
ADVENTURES OF  
SANTA CLAUS**

**BY**

**AMELIA C. HOUGHTON**

*with illustrations by*

**HOKIE**



**YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS**  
**CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA**

Cover and arrangement © 2006 Yesterday's Classics.

This edition, first published in 2006 by Yesterday's Classics, is an unabridged republication of the work originally published by Santa Claus Publishing Co. in 1932. The author of that work was Julie Lane, a pen name of Amelia C. Houghton. For a complete listing of the books published by Yesterday's Classics, please visit [www.yesterdaysclassics.com](http://www.yesterdaysclassics.com). Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of the Baldwin Project which presents the complete text of dozens of classic books for children at [www.mainlesson.com](http://www.mainlesson.com) under the editorship of Lisa M. Ripperton and T. A. Roth.

ISBN-10: 1-59915-191-X

ISBN-13: 978-1-59915-191-5

Yesterday's Classics  
PO Box 3418  
Chapel Hill, NC 27515

**D**raw close to the fire, all you who believe in the spirit of Christmas, whether you call it Santa Claus, or simply good will to men; and listen to the story of Nicholas the Wandering Orphan who became Nicholas the Woodcarver, a lover of little children. Follow him through his first years as a lonely little boy, who had the knack of carving playthings for children; then as a young man, busy over the little toys; then as a prosperous, fat, rosy old man, who overcomes all sorts of difficulties in order to attain his ambition, a toy for every child in the village. Learn how he started to drive a beautiful sleigh drawn by prancing reindeer; why he first came down a chimney; how he filled the first stocking; where the first Christmas tree was decorated; and finally how he came to be known as “Saint Nicholas” and “Santa Claus.”



# CONTENTS

NICHOLAS LOSES HIS FAMILY .....	1
NICHOLAS MAKES HIS FIRST GIFT .....	6
THE RACE FOR A SLED .....	13
THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS .....	24
NICHOLAS, THE WOOD-CARVER.....	38
THE FIRST CHRISTMAS STOCKING .....	45
NICHOLAS' FIRST RED SUIT .....	56
DONDER AND BLITZEN .....	64
VIXEN, THE NAUGHTY REINDEER.....	72
NICHOLAS GOES DOWN THE CHIMNEY .....	79
THE FIRST CHRISTMAS TREE.....	91
A PRESENT FOR NICHOLAS .....	101
HOLLY GETS ITS NAME .....	109
THE LAST STOCKING.....	120
THE PASSING OF NICHOLAS.....	126
SANTA CLAUS.....	129



# CHAPTER 1

## NICHOLAS LOSES HIS FAMILY



ONCE upon a time, hundreds and hundreds of years ago, in a little village on the shores of the Baltic Sea, there lived a poor fisherman and his wife and their two children—a four-year-old son, Nicholas, and a tiny baby girl, Katje. They were only poor fisherfolk, and their home was a simple, one-room cottage, built of heavy stone blocks to keep out the freezing north wind, but it was a cheery little place in spite of the poverty of its occupants, because all the hearts there were loving and happy.

On cold winter nights, after the fisherman had come home from his hard day's work out on the open sea, the little family would gather around the

## THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS

broad open fireplace,—the father stretching his tired limbs before the warm fire, puffing peacefully at his after-supper pipe, the mother knitting busily and casting now and then a watchful eye on the two children playing on the floor. Nicholas was busy over a tiny piece of wood, which he had decked with gay bits of cloth and worsted, while little Katje watched him with round, excited blue eyes, finally reaching out her eager, fat little hands to take the doll Brother Nicholas had made for her. The glad crowing of the baby over her new toy aroused the father, who turned to look at the scene with amused eyes, and then a rather disapproving shake of the head.

“Eh, Mother,” he said, “I’d rather see Nicholas down at the boats with me learning to mend a net than fussing with little girls’ toys and forever carrying Katje about with him. ’Tisn’t natural for a boy to be so. Now when . . .”

“Hush, man,” interrupted the woman. “Nicholas is hardly more than a baby himself, and it’s a blessing that he takes such care of Katje. I feel perfectly safe about her when she’s playing with her brother; he’s so gentle and sweet to her. Time enough for him to be a fisherman when he grows too old to play with his baby sister.”

“True enough, wife. He’s a good lad, and he’ll be a better man for learning to be kind to little ones.”

So for another year Nicholas went on fashioning rude little playthings for Katje, and the mother

*NICHOLAS LOSES HIS FAMILY*



“He’s a good lad.”

## *THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS*

went about her many household tasks busily and happily, and the father continued earning his family's daily bread in the teeth of biting gales and wild seas. In this way the little family might have gone on for years, until the father and mother had grown old, until Katje had become a beautiful young maiden taking the burden of the housework from her mother's shoulders, and until Nicholas had become a tall, strong youth, going out every day in his father's little fishing boat. All this might have been, but for the events of one wild, tragic night.

Little Katje lay in her crib tossing feverishly. The mother bent over her fearfully, taking her eyes from the hot little face only to glance anxiously now and then towards the door, and straining her ears between each wail of the sick baby for sounds of footsteps on the stone walk outside the cottage. For the father was late,—late tonight of all nights, when he was needed to run to the other end of the town for the doctor. As the minutes dragged on, the storm outside grew in fury, and the fear in the woman's heart over the absence of her husband and the painful whimpering of the child finally goaded her into action. She arose from her position beside the crib and swiftly putting her shawl over her shoulders, spoke to Nicholas, who was trying to comfort little Katje.

“Listen, my son,” she said quickly, “your father is late and I'll have to go for the doctor myself. I'll have to leave you alone with Katje. You'll take care of her, won't you, Nicholas, until Mother gets back? Just see that she stays covered, and wet

## *NICHOLAS LOSES HIS FAMILY*

this cloth now and then for her poor, hot little forehead.”

Nicholas nodded solemnly—of course he would take care of Katje. The mother patted his head and smiled, and then was out in the wet, black, windy night. And Nicholas watched Katje until she suddenly stopped tossing the coverings aside, and her hot little forehead grew cooler and cooler and then cold to his touch; and as the embers in the fireplace grew black and then gray, his head nodded, and he fell asleep on the floor beside the crib.

And that’s the way the villagers found him the next morning, when they carried home his father, drowned when his boat was caught in the storm, and his mother, stricken down by a falling tree. So, of the once happy little family of four, there was now only Nicholas, the orphan.

## CHAPTER 2

### HIS FIRST CHRISTMAS GIFT



THE fishermen of the village smoked one pipe after another, and scratched their heads for a long time over the problem; their good wives gathered together and clacked their tongues as busily as their knitting needles; and the main topic of every conversation was—“What is to become of that boy Nicholas?”

“Of course,” said fat Kristin, wife of Hans, the rope-maker, “no one wants to see the child go hungry or leave him out in the cold; but with five little ones of our own, I don’t see how we can take him in.”

“Yes,” chimed in Mistress Elena Grozik, “and with the long winter well set in, and the men barely

## *NICHOLAS MAKES HIS FIRST GIFT*

able to go out in the boats, no fisherman's family knows for certain where the next piece of bread is coming from. And with the scarcity of fuel . . . ”

All the ladies shivered and drew closer to Greta Bavran's comfortable log fire, and sighed heavily over their knitting.

Mistress Greta arose and poked the fire thoughtfully.

“We could take him for awhile,” she meditated aloud. “Jan had many a good catch last season, and we have somewhat laid by for the winter. We have only the three children, and there's that cot in the storehouse where he could sleep . . . Mind you,” she interrupted herself sharply as she noticed the look of relief spreading over the others' faces, “mind you, we might not have a crust to eat ourselves next winter, and besides, I think everybody in the village should have a share in this.”

“Quite right, Mistress Bavran,” spoke up another. Then, turning to the group, “Why can't we all agree that each one of us here will take Nicholas into her home for, say a year, then let him change to another family, and so on until he reaches an age when he can fend for himself?”

“I suppose Olaf and I can manage for one winter,” said one woman thoughtfully.

“You may count on me,” added another. “Not for a few years, though; we have too many babies in the house now. I'll wait until Nicholas gets a bit older.”

*THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS*

Greta Bavran gave the last speaker a sharp look. "Yes, when he's able to do more work," she muttered under her breath. Then aloud—"There are ten of us here now. If we each agree to take Nicholas for a year, that will take care of him until he's fifteen, and without a doubt, he'll run away to sea long before that."

The ladies laughed approvingly, then feeling very virtuous at having provided for Nicholas until he reached the age of fifteen, they arose, wrapped up their knitting, and proceeded to wrap themselves up in shawls and woolens before going out into the sharp winter air.

"Will you find my Jan at the shop, and tell him to fetch Nicholas from the Widow Lufvitch where he's been staying?" called Greta after the last woman.

"That I will, Greta; then I must hurry to my baking. I almost forgot the Christmas feast tomorrow, with all this talk about the orphan."

So it was that Nicholas came to his first home-for-a-year on Christmas Eve, to kindly people who tried their best to make a lonely little five-year-old boy forget the tragic events of the past week. In spite of the festivities of the day, he curled himself up in a corner of the storeroom, and with heartbroken sobs for his lost mother and father and beloved Katje, tried to drown out the sounds of merrymaking in the cottage. But the door opened, and a little form was seen in the ray of light.

*NICHOLAS MAKES HIS FIRST GIFT*



“What do you want?” asked Nicholas.

## *THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS*

“What do you want?” asked Nicholas almost roughly. “Go away; I want to be alone.”

The other little boy’s mouth quivered. “My boat’s broken,” he cried, “my new boat I got for the Christmas feast, and Father’s gone out, and Mother can’t fix it.” He held up a toy fishing boat.

Nicholas dried his eyes on his sleeves and took the broken toy in his hands. “I’ll fix it for you,” and he turned back to his corner.

“Oh, come in here where there’s more light,” said the youngest Bavran.

So Nicholas went in where there was more light, and more children, and more laughter.

As the year passed, the little boy gradually forgot his grief in the busy, happy life of the Bavran household. The other three children played with him, quarreled with him, and came to accept him as one of themselves. Nicholas, in his turn, was not too young to appreciate the happy year he spent with his new brother and sisters, and when he heard talk in the household that Christmas Day would soon bring to a close his stay with the Bavrans, his mind was confused with many different thoughts. There was sorrow in his heart at leaving, a fear of what unknown life was awaiting him in the next house, and a growing desire to do something, no matter how small, to show his benefactors how much he loved them and their children. The only things he owned in the world were the clothes he wore, an extra coat and trousers, a sea-chest and a jack-knife which had belonged to his father. He couldn’t part

## *NICHOLAS MAKES HIS FIRST GIFT*

with any of these, and yet he wanted to leave some little gift. A happy thought struck him—Katie had always loved the little dolls and animals he had made for her out of bits of wood; maybe now, with the help of the jack-knife, he could fashion something even better. So, for the last two weeks of his stay, he worked secretly in the dark storeroom, hiding his knife and wood when he heard anybody approaching, and struggling furiously the last few days so that all would be finished by Christmas morning; because, since it was Christmas when the Bavrans had taken him last winter, he must be passed along in exactly a year's time.

The toys finally were finished. Nicholas gave them a last loving polish, and looked at them admiringly—a handsome doll, dressed in a bright red skirt, for Margret, the eldest; a little doll-chair, with three straight legs and one not so straight, for the next little girl, Gretchen; and a beautiful sleigh for his playmate, Otto.

So the next day, when the three children were weeping loudly as they watched the little sea-chest being packed, and their father was waiting at the door to take Nicholas to Hans the rope-maker's house, the departing orphan slowly drew from behind his back the rough little toys he had made, and forgot to cry himself as he watched the glee with which the children welcomed their gifts. And a lovely glow seemed to spread itself over his heart when he heard their thanks and saw their happy faces.

## *THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS*

“Well, I’ll be going now. Good-by, Margret; good-by, Gretchen; good-by, Otto. Next year I can make the toys better. I’ll make you some next Christmas, too.”

And with this promise, Nicholas bravely turned his back on the happy scene, to face another year some place else. His small form looked smaller still as he trudged along in the snow beside the tall figure of Jan Bavran. His thin brown face, surrounded by a shock of yellow hair, seemed older than his six years, saddened as it was by this parting, but the blue eyes were still gay and warm at the thought of the happiness he had left behind him.

“Well,” he thought to himself as they approached the rope-maker’s house, “maybe the five children here will be just as nice to me as the Bavrans, and I can make toys for them, too. Christmas can be a happy day for me, too, even if it is my moving day.”



# CHAPTER 3

## THE RACE FOR A SLED



THE Christmas days that followed were happy, not only for Nicholas, but for all the children he met in his travels from house to house. At the rope-maker's cottage, most of the winter evenings were spent by the children learning to wind and untangle masses of twine, and to do most of the simple net-mending. Nicholas discovered that by loosening strands of flaxen-colored hemp he could make the

most realistic hair for the little wooden dolls he still found time to carve. When he left at the end of the year on Christmas Day, the rope-maker's five little children found five little toys waiting for them on the mantel of their fireplace, and Nicholas did not

## *THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS*

forget his promise to the three Bavrans, but made a special trip to their house Christmas morning with their gifts.

And so it happened, as the years went on, and Nicholas grew more and more skillful with his father's jack-knife, that the children of each household came to expect one of Nicholas' toys on Christmas Day. Not one child was ever disappointed, for the young wood-carver had a faculty for remembering exactly what each child liked. Fishermen's sons received toy boats built just as carefully as the larger boats their fathers owned; little girls were delighted with dolls that had "real hair," and with little chairs and tables where they could have real tea-parties.

All this time, Nicholas had been busy with many other things besides toy-making. As he grew into a tall, strong boy, there were many tasks in which he had his share, and which he did willingly and well. In the spring, he learned to dig and plant the hard northern soil with the vegetables the family lived on during the winter; all summer he helped with the boats, mended nets, took care of chickens, cows, horses, and in one well-to-do household, even reindeer. He was an especial favorite with the mothers, because the babies and younger children would flock to Nicholas, who would play with them and care for them, thus giving the tired mothers a chance to attend to the housework. During the winter months, Nicholas attended school with the other boys and girls of the village, learning his A B C's in

## *THE RACE FOR A SLED*

exchange for carrying in the wood for the schoolmaster's fire.

So on one particular winter's day we find Nicholas on his way to school, trudging along a snowy country road, dragging behind him a sled loaded with logs of wood. He is now fourteen years old, a tall, thin boy, dressed in the long, heavy tunic coat of the village, home-knit woolen leggings, and a close-fitting black cap pulled down over his yellow hair. His eyes are blue and twinkling, and his cheeks rosy from the keen winter air. He whistles happily, because, although in a week it will be Christmas-time once more, and he will have to make his final change, he remembers the chest full of finished toys—one for every child in the village. It is the first year he has been able to do this, and the thought of his trips on Christmas morning, when he will personally deliver to every child one of his famous toys, makes him almost skip along, burdened though he is with the heavy sled of wood.

Finally he reached the yard of the schoolmaster's cottage, and was immediately attracted by the group of schoolboys, who, instead of running about playing their usual games and romping in the snow, were gathered together in one big group, excitedly discussing something. As Nicholas entered the yard, they rushed over to him and began talking all at once, their faces aglow with the wonderful news they had to tell.

“Oh, Nicholas, there's going to be a race . . .”

*THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS*

“ . . . on sleds—Christmas morning—and the Squire is going . . . ”

“ . . . He’s going to give a prize to the one who . . . ”

“No, let me tell him. Nicholas, listen. It’s going to start . . . ”

Nicholas turned a bewildered look from one eager speaker to another.

“What are you all trying to say? One at a time, there. Let Otto talk. Otto, what’s all this about a prize, and races, and the Squire?”

Otto drew a long, important breath, and began to talk fast so no one would interrupt him.

“There’s going to be a big sled race on Christmas morning. All the boys are to start with their sleds at the Squire’s gate at the top of the hill, and the first one who gets back to the big pine behind the Squire’s vegetable garden on the other side of the house wins the prize—and—what is the prize? A big new sled . . . ”

“With steel runners!” all the boys chorused delightedly.

“With steel runners!” echoed Nicholas in an awed whisper. “Go on, Otto. How are you supposed to go *up* a hill on a sled? And where else does the race go?”

Otto frowned at the others for silence, and continued. “Well, you coast down the long hill, and that will carry you across the frozen creek at the bot-

## THE RACE FOR A SLED

tom. Then there's that patch of trees near the wood-cutter's cottage. Well, here's where the fun comes in. Every place you can't coast, you have to pull or carry your sled. There are about three fences to go over—the Groziks', the Bavrans', and the Pavlicks'; then you have to go through the Black Wood, where you know there are some clear, hilly stretches, and other places where you can't coast because of the trees. After you go through the wood, there's a long slide down to the village pasture; then you go back across the creek at the rapids, where it *isn't* frozen, then up the long hill behind the Squire's to the big pine. There, how's that for a race?"

Otto paused for breath triumphantly, and the others all started in again.

"Nicholas, you'll enter, won't you? That's not a bad sled you have, even if you did . . ."

"Hush, Jan," whispered another. "It isn't nice to remind Nicholas that he made his own sled, just because our fathers had ours made for us."

But Nicholas was not listening to the conversation. He was thinking swiftly. Finally he turned to the others and asked, "What time does the race begin?"

"Nine o'clock sharp on Christmas morning," was the answer.

Nicholas shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't know whether I can be there," he said slowly. He was thinking of the chest full of toys he had planned to deliver to almost every house in

## *THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS*

the village. He had so many chores to do when he got up in the morning, that he didn't see how he could possibly finish his work, make his rounds with the gifts, and still be in time for the start of the race at nine o'clock.

The other boys looked at him, suddenly silenced by the thought that came to every mind. They knew what Nicholas was thinking of when he said he wasn't sure that he'd be there, and although every child had come to expect a toy from Nicholas on Christmas morning, these boys were too embarrassed to put into words the fact that because Nicholas was so good to them, and especially to their smaller brothers and sisters, he might not be able to enter this race, which was so exciting to every boy's heart. And for all his gentleness, Nicholas was a real boy, and felt the desire to enter this race and win the big sled with steel runners, just as much as any boy present.

"By getting up very early, and hurrying, I could get there," he was thinking. "If it only weren't for the doll I have to bring to Elsa, away outside the village . . . Oh, I have it!" his eyes gleamed with excitement. He suddenly remembered that Elsa's father was the wood-cutter, and that their cottage was right in the path of the race. The doll could easily be dropped off in a few seconds, and he could continue.

"I'll be there! I'll be there! At nine o'clock sharp, and then you'd better watch out for the prize," he shouted gleefully. "My old home-made

## THE RACE FOR A SLED

sled may be heavy for the pulls and the places we have to carry, but that will make it all the faster on the coasts. I'll go by you just like this!"

And he made a lunge past little Josef Ornoff, which tumbled the astonished little fellow into a deep snowbank. All the other boys laughingly piled Nicholas in with Josef, and the whole meeting broke up in a fast and furious snow battle.

\* \* \* \* \*

When the children of the village arose on Christmas morning, they found a bright sun streaming in through the cottage windows and gleaming on the hard crusted snow on the roads. But they also found that Nicholas had been there, and probably even before the sun, because every doorway in the village was heaped with the little toys—the result of a whole year's work. After the excitement over the gifts, all the boys made an anxious last-minute inspection of their sleds, made a trial run or two, and then the whole village started in a body for the starting-point of the race.

Nicholas, meanwhile, was back in his little shed, desperately working on a broken runner. It had collapsed at the last house under the strain of the extra-heavy burden of wooden toys, and even as Nicholas was feverishly lashing heavy bits of rope and twisted cord around the bottom of his sled, he could hear the faint echo of the horn from the Squire's house at the top of the hill, announcing the start of the race. He could have sobbed with disap-

## *THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS*

pointment, because he knew that he never could get there in time to start with the others, but he also realized he had to get to the wood-cutter's house anyway, so he turned the mended sled upright, and made a mad dash for the hilltop, where he found the villagers already looking excitedly after a group of black specks speeding down the hill, and shouting words of encouragement at the racers. As Nicholas panted his way through the crowd, they all made way for him, with loud expressions of sympathy that he hadn't arrived there in time.

"Come on, Nicholas lad," shouted Jan Bavran. "I vow I'd rather see you win than my own Otto. Here, men, let's give him a good push. One—two—three—off he goes!"

And down the hill sped Nicholas, his face and eyes stinging in the swift rush of wind, his hands cleverly steering the heavy sled which gained more and more speed so that the wooden runners seemed hardly to touch the packed snow. On and on he went, swifter and swifter; and now his eyes glowed with excitement as he saw that the boys' figures ahead of him were black specks no longer, and that he must have gained a good bit of ground.

Then, as the hill sloped more gently and the pace slackened, he noticed something ahead which puzzled him. The boys had all stopped on the other side of the frozen creek! Instead of going on through the patch of woods on the other side, they had, one and all, calmly alighted from their sleds, and were now standing stock-still, watching Nicholas

## THE RACE FOR A SLED

approach. As his sled slowed down, and finally stopped, he looked bewilderedly from one to another, and started "What in the world . . ."

"Come on, Nicholas," spoke up little Josef; "we would have waited for you at the top, but the Squire got impatient and made us start when the horn blew. But of course you knew we'd wait for you."

"Yes," shouted Otto, "go throw that doll in Elsa's doorway, and then let's go! And from now on, see how long we'll wait for you! First come, first served with the sled with the steel runners!"

Nicholas put his hand on the nearest boy's shoulder. His eyes glistened with moisture, but it must have been from the sharp wind on the coast. He didn't say anything, but he was so happy at this boyish way of showing friendship that his heart was full.

Twenty boys delivered a doll to astonished little Elsa, and then, with a wild shout, they were off again, dragging their sleds after them, knocking against tree-trunks, getting their ropes tangled in low scrubby bushes, stumbling over rocks, climbing over fences, jumping on now and then for a stretch of coasting, bumping each other—laughing, excited, eager, happy boys!

And Nicholas was the happiest of all, even though his sled was heavy to pull and clumsy to lift over fences. (His friends had waited for him!) Up would go the strong young arms and the sled was over the fence into the next field. (They *did* like him,

## *THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF SANTA CLAUS*

even though he was an orphan and had no house of his own, but had to be passed around!) Over a steep grade he would drag the sled and then fling himself down for a wild rush. (And he had finished his morning's work too; every child in the village was playing with a toy Nicholas had made!) The long slide down to the village pasture with only one boy ahead of him! (I'll show them; I'll never let a Christmas pass without visiting every child in the village!) Now carrying the heavy sled on his shoulders while he felt slowly for a foothold on the flat stones of the part of the creek that was not frozen; he was the first boy to cross! (Up at the top of the hill, there's a beautiful sled with steel runners. It's big! It will hold twice as many toys as this old thing.) Up the hill, panting, hot, yellow locks flying in the wind, digging his toes in the hard snow, pulling for dear life at "the old thing," turning around excitedly once or twice to see how close the next boy was; then—suddenly, he heard the shouts of the villagers and he was at the top! He leaned against the big pine; he was home—he had won the race!

The big sled with steel runners was beautiful, but it was more beautiful still to see the defeated boys pulling Nicholas home on his prize, while the littler children hopped on behind and climbed lovingly all over the victor, and each mother and father smiled proudly as though it had been their own son who had won the race.

*THE RACE FOR A SLED*

