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CHRISTMAS  
IN MY HEART

A TREASURY OF TIMELESS  
CHRISTMAS STORIES

I4



*compiled and edited by*  
JOE L. WHEELER



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## THE CHRISTMAS WISH

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*The Bishop didn't think it was funny at all—in fact it bordered on the sacrilegious!*

*So the pastor apprehensively took the wishbone with him when he knocked on the door of the Jennisons' house. Perhaps someone there would tell him why a chicken wishbone was dropped in an offering plate.*

"Don't think it's funny," the Bishop said sharply. He stood up, and to the young Reverend Thomas Barlow he had never looked more imposing. "It's in bad taste. It's irreverent. It's—it's almost sacrilegious!"

Tom Barlow thought wretchedly that it did look odd: the great silver collection dish, the pile of bills and Christmas offering-envelopes, and in the middle, naked and unashamed, the wishbone of a large chicken.

"According to the usher," the Bishop said grimly, "this—this thing came from the Jennisons' pew. Well, the Jennisons may be as irreverent in their own home as they like, but this is the house of God!"

He moved over to the window where eddying snowflakes sifted gently. A white Christmas. Until now, a joyous Christmas. *Oh, why*, Tom Barlow asked himself, *did the Bishop have to preach his Christmas sermon here?*

The Bishop wheeled around. "Barlow, if these people talk about this indignity, the prestige of the church will suffer. I think you ought to see them personally and get an apology. This afternoon."

"*This afternoon*," said the Bishop. "And take that object with you!"

The gleaming streets were decorated in honor of Christ's birthday, but driving through them, Tom Barlow felt no answering lift in his spirits. It was true enough that during his brief pastorate at Trinity Church he had been trying to attract people like the Jennisons: young, suave—the "cocktail set" some called them. It was also true that Cele Jennison looked like a fashion model, and Kirby Jennison had that careless assurance that sometimes made Tom Barlow feel

uncomfortable. But sitting in church with their seven-year-old daughter, Lisa, beside them, they made a handsome sight.

One thing was certain: no apology would be forthcoming from the Jennisons. At best, they would laugh. At worst, they would be angry—and that would end their relationship with Trinity Church.

“Lord,” whispered Tom Barlow in one of his sudden, unpremeditated prayers, “You’ll have to help me with this. I don’t have the slightest idea of how to handle it.”



The Christmas wreath on the door of the Jennisons’ house was enormous; the festive tree in the living room glowed brightly. And yet, it seemed to Tom Barlow, there was an undercurrent of something: tension, friction, unhappiness. . . .

“A wishbone in the collection plate?” Cele Jennison burst out laughing. “Oh, how wonderful! I wish I could take the credit, but I can’t. As for Kirby—that doesn’t sound like him at all!”

Kirby Jennison shook his head. “Not guilty. You don’t suppose Lisa . . .”

“Lisa?” Cele Jennison looked startled. “Well, we could ask her.”

The child came in, sat down on the long sofa, hands tightly folded. When her mother put the question, she nodded mutely.

“But why?” said Kirby Jennison. “Why did you do it, Lisa?”

The child said softly, "I wanted God to help me with my Christmas wish."

"What wish?" Tom Barlow said.

The small voice was almost inaudible. "That Daddy and Mummy wouldn't fight. That we'd all be happy, the way we used to be."

Cele Jennison's eyes filled with tears. Kirby Jennison sat very still. It was the Reverend Mr. Barlow who finally moved.

He went to the child, who looked miserable and lost. From his pocket he took the wishbone. "To get your wish, Lisa, you have to pull it with somebody."

He beckoned to Cele Jennison. She came forward quickly. The snap of the wishbone was loud in the stillness.

"There," said Tom Barlow. "You've got the long end, Lisa. The long end gets the wish. And just to make *sure* . . ." He held his hand out to Cele Jennison.

"Could I have your wedding ring, please?"

She stripped it off with fingers that shook a little. He took it and handed it to her husband. "Now, if you two will just stand together in front of the Christmas tree. . . ."

They obeyed him without question.

"Dearly Beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company . . ."

*Heavens*, a faint inner voice was saying to Tom Barlow, *the Bishop won't be getting his apology after all*. But he found, now, that it didn't matter. These were his people. By remarrying them in the sight of their child, he was helping them to the happiest Christmas of their lives.

*Arthur Gordon*

*Arthur Gordon*

(1912–2002)

During his long and memorable career, Arthur Gordon edited such magazines as *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Guideposts*. He was author of a number of books, including *Reprisal* (1950), *Norman Vincent Peale: Minister to Millions* (1958), *A Touch of Wonder* (1983), and *Return to Wonder* (1996), as well as several hundred short stories.