

Christmas Eve at Mother Hubbard's

(A Christmas Play for School or Parlor Entertainment)

By S. J. D.

From the book, St. Nicholas Book of Plays and Operettas

CHARACTERS:

Little Miss Muffet

Little Jack Horner

Little Boy Blue

Little Bo-peep

Jack

Jill

Mistress Mary

Simple Simon

Old Mother Hubbard

Santa Claus

SCENE

(A room at Mother Hubbard's; two doors, one supposed to open to the outer air, the other to lead into another part of the house; also a cupboard with closed door. Little Miss Muffet and Jack Horner disclosed, seated, as the curtain rises.)

MISS MUFFET: Can you tell me, Jack Horner, why so many of us have been asked to come here to Old Mother Hubbard's tonight? What does she want of us? What is she going to have us do?

JACK HORNER: Do? Why, I thought it was a sort of a party, perhaps--forfeits, and dancing, and stagecoach, and so on. And afterward--well, I have been wondering whether we shall have ice-cream and cake, or nuts and raisins and apples. *(Rising and walking about discontentedly.)* I declare, it's a shame, Miss Muffet. Do you know I am not to have any Christmas pie this year?

MISS MUFFET: Why not?

JACK HORNER: Oh, well, you know that old trick of mine about the plums; my folks thought it bad manners, and so I am to go without my pie. *(Sits down again moodily.)* And what's Jack Horner without a Christmas pie?

MISS MUFFET: Well, I haven't any curds or whey, either; but it was a *very* old-fashioned dish, and doing without it does away with the spider, so I am very well pleased. Boys are so queer--always hungry, always thinking of something to eat!

JACK HORNER: And girls are so *very* queer--afraid of spiders, shrieking at a mouse! When a fellow is asked out of an evening, I don't think it at all queer he should expect a little something in the way of refreshments.

MISS MUFFET: But this isn't to be a party. We were asked here to help about something. And then, to

expect ice-cream at Mother Hubbard's! Why, she can't. It isn't nice to speak of it, but you know that pitiful story about her dog.

JACK HORNER: Oh, well, there are better times now. Yes, I know the old story. And that's the very cupboard over there. (*Rising, with curiosity.*) I've a good mind to just go peep into that cupboard and see if it really *is* bare.

MISS MUFFET: (*Speaking as he tiptoes across the room.*) What sort of manners do you call it, Jack Horner, to go prying into other folks' cupboards?

(*As Jack lays his hand on the cupboard door a horn is heard without, and he jumps back guiltily.*)

MISS MUFFET: Who's afraid *now*, I'd like to know?

JACK HORNER: Who can it be?

(*The horn sounds again, and Little Boy Blue enters.*)

BOY BLUE: Hallo! Here are two of you before me--old friends, of course; but I haven't met any Mother Goose people in so long in time that I'm afraid I shan't know you all. Now, who are you, ma'am, if I may be allowed to ask?

MISS MUFFET: *I* am Little Miss Muffet.

BOY BLUE: Oh, yes--who sat on a tuffet. Well, then, now's my chance to ask you about something that has always puzzled me tremendously. *What* is a tuffet?

MISS MUFFET: (*Jumping up from her stool and placing it before him.*) *That* is a tuffet!

BOY BLUE: That? Why, that's nothing but a little footstool! What makes them call it a tuffet?

MISS MUFFET: Because "tuffet" rhymes with "Muffet," stupid, and "footstool" doesn't!

JACK HORNER: No, nor hassock, nor ottoman. To be puzzled over an easy thing like that! Where are your wits, Boy Blue? Are they under the haymow, fast asleep?

BOY BLUE: (*Good-naturedly.*) Well, Jack, my boy, you will be pretending next that you are always sitting about in a corner so as to make yourself rhyme with "Horner." Now, isn't it because you are just a *little* lazy, and a *little* bit afraid of the weather?

JACK HORNER: (*Jumping up testily.*) See here, Boy Blue, I don't like that!

MISS MUFFET: Oh, dear! If you boys go to quarreling and fussing, it will spoil our whole evening.

(*Bo-peep knocks at the door with her crook, and then enters.*)

BOY BLUE: (*Advancing with a smile.*) I called for you, Bo-peep, and you had already gone.

BO-PEEP: Yes; I stopped for Jill, but she and Jack couldn't start for a little while yet, and I came on

alone.

JACK HORNER: Won't you take my chair, Miss Bo-peep? Was it snowing when you came in?

BO-PEEP: Oh, it is glorious winter weather. How I do love the frost and cold! It makes me feel ready for anything! Where's Mother Hubbard?

MISS MUFFET: She was called away just after Jack Horner and I came, and she hasn't been in the room since. Why do you carry your crook in winter, Bo-peep?

BO-PEEP: I like to have it when I'm skating; and then, it's pleasant to carry it--it reminds me of the summer-time.

JACK HORNER: Then you like the summer better than winter? So do I.

BO-PEEP: Well, I like the autumn better still; and springtime--that's the best of all.

BOY BLUE: You and I love all the seasons, Bo-peep, because we live so much outdoors. We know them all so well, and all their good times. As I was coming along through the snow just now, I found myself humming that "May Song" of yours.

MISS MUFFET: Oh, Bo-peep, sing it for us, won't you?

BO-PEEP: Why, I will, if Boy Blue does his part, too.

BOY BLUE: All right. You begin.

MAY SONG:

(For music, see "St. Nicholas Songs," page 172)

BO-PEEP:

Light is the heart of the young country lass
When May smiles, "good day" through the wicket;
Blossoms a-bloom in the tender green grass,
Birds all a-tune in the thicket.

Up and away at the first ray of morn,
Out where the sunbeams are playing!
Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn,
For we would be early a-Maying--
(Horn) Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la!

For we would be early a-Maying--
(Horn) Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la!

BOY BLUE:

Gay is the lot of the young country lad
When decked is the May-pole for dancing,
Fiddlers all there and a-fiddling like mad,
Every one skipping and prancing.
Hie! What a feast we shall have on the green,

Candy and cake and no paying.

BO-PEEP:

Oh, me, one would like a king or a queen
If one could always be a-Maying!
Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la!
For we would be early a-Maying--
Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la!
But lassies and laddies must work, it is true;
All is not pleasure and funning.
There's baking and churning

BOY BLUE:

and plowing to do,

BO-PEEP:

And errands to keep one a-running.

BOY BLUE:

Cows to be tended and kept from the corn;

BO-PEEP:

Sheep that forever are straying:
So at sunrise, Boy Blue, come blow us your horn;
We'll to work, and have time left for playing--
(Horn) Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la!
There'll be plenty of time left for playing--
(Horn) Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la-la!

(At the close of the song a heavy fall and a commotion are heard outside.)

MISS MUFFET: *(Running to the door.)* What can be the matter?

(Jack and Jill enter, the former hobbling, and holding his head with a wry face.)

BO-PEEP: Why, it's Jack, and you too, Jill! How's this? Have you had another tumble?

JILL: Oh, Jack had to go and fall on a little slippery place near the door. Trust Jack for finding the slippery places!

JACK: Well, Mother Hubbard asked me to *drop in* this evening, and I was trying to oblige her. Only I dropped too soon. I wasn't quite *in*. Whew! Didn't I give my head a crack, though!

JILL: Jack wants to join a baseball nine, but I tell him he's too good a tumbler to make a good pitcher.

JACK HORNER: *(Trying to look important.)* Pooh, pooh! Baseball, indeed! That's out of date, and lawn-tennis, too. Golf's your game! Golf's the game for me!

BOY BLUE: *(Patting him on the back.)* There, there, sonny! You'll grow up to them all. Croquet and

ring-toss are better for you, at your age!

JACK: Well, Jill will have her joke. And it's better to laugh than cry, say I.

JILL: Sing them that song you composed about all your tumbles. It will make you forget your headache.

JACK: Oh, it's too long. It has forty-eight verses, each about a separate accident, and then three or four in which I give a sort of summing up and a moral.

BOY BLUE: (*Hastily.*) Just give us the summing up. Never mind about the other forty-eight verses.

JACK'S SONG:

(*For music, see "St. Nicholas Songs," page 128, "There was a little girl," etc. Use first verse of music for first and second verses of song, and last verse for third verse of song.*)

If I'm walking on a level
Where you'd think that I might revel
In the comfort and the safety of the way,
Then I'm bound to stub my toe,
And the first thing that you know,
Jack is on his back again, alackaday!

Oh, I've broken both my shoulders,
And the very smallest boulders
Are enough to twist my ankles all awry;
Where the others dance and skip
I am always sure to trip,
Dislocate my collar-bone and bruise my thigh!

But it doesn't so much matter
Just how many bones I shatter,
Nor how oft the nickname "Buttertoed" I've heard;
For our Jill says (bless her soul!)
That I keep my temper whole,
And I never twist the truth or break my word!

BO-PEEP: Well, Jack, I like that song. It's just fine!

BOY BLUE: So say I!

JACK: (*Rubbing his head ruefully.*) Singing it didn't improve my head any.

MISS MUFFET: Poor boy! Let me take you to find Mother Hubbard, and she will have you lie down a little while, and give Jill something to bathe the sore spot.

(*The three go out, leaving inner door open. A gentle knock, and Mistress Mary enters at other door. Bo-peep is facing the door, and the newcomer holds her hands out toward her with a smile. Bo-peep takes them.*)

BO-PEEP: I feel as if you must be an old and dear friend, and yet I cannot tell your name.

MISTRESS MARY: Why, I am Mistress Mary the kindergartner. And if you would like to know how my garden grows, I shall be delighted to tell you all about it.

JACK HORNER: (*Surprised.*) You Mistress Mary? And you look so pleasant and so cheery! I thought they used to say you were--well, sort of--oh, you know--

BOY BLUE: Contrary? Why, Jack, my fine fellow, where are your wits? That is just to rhyme with "Mary." "Contrary" rhymes with "Mary, and "pleasant" doesn't, nor "charming."

MISTRESS MARY: No; they really thought me contrary, and very, very queer--"cranky," I think they would call it nowadays. But that was only because they didn't understand the Froebel system. They weren't familiar with the "gifts and occupations," and they couldn't see what silver bells or cockleshells or balls or cubes or cylinders had to do with the training of the little maids in my kindergarten. By the way, they didn't stand in a row at all, my little maids, but in a circle, as they do today.

BOY BLUE: But if I may make bold to ask, what *have* silver bells and cockle-shells to do with schooling?

MISTRESS MARY: I can tell you best in a little song we have made about them, if you would like to have me sing it to you.

BO-PEEP: Please do. That will be delightful.

MISTRESS MARY'S SONG:

(*For music, see "St. Nicholas Songs," page 110, "The Singaway Bird."*)

Now list while I tell
Of the small silver bell
That rings in the year's early morning;
The first flower we see,
It's a-quiver with glee
As it gives to the others their warning:
"Ting-ting, it is spring, ting-a-ling!
Ting-ting, ting-a-ling, it is spring!"
Up come the flowers at the jubilant knell
Of this small rising-bell--silver bell.

And this fair cockle-shell,
Once so happy to dwell
At the edge of the murmuring billow,
It will sound at your ear,
In a voice that you hear
As though dreams on a wave-cradled pillow:
"List! List! The sea murmuring.
List! List! The sea whispering."
It has tales that are wondrous to tell
In its dream-talk, this fair cockle-shell.

So the bell from the lea
And the shell from the sea
Hold marvels we fain would be knowing;
And they tell each in turn
What 't is lovely to learn,
Little maids, in my child garden growing.
"Ting-ting! Hear me ring--ting-a-ling!"
"List, list, to the sea whispering!"
Whisper, fair shell; ring for us, silver bell;
For your message is fair--fair to hear, fair to tell!

BOY BLUE: I think I wouldn't mind belonging to your school myself.

BO-PEEP: I would join it in a minute if I wasn't so big.

JACK HORNER: Here comes Mother Hubbard, and who's that with her?

BOY BLUE: Why, it's Simple Simon! There's a scholar for you, Mistress Mary! Even you could not drum any wisdom into him.

MISTRESS MARY: If I had had him young enough, I could have done it.

(Simon enters shuffling and sheepishly.)

MISTRESS MARY: Good evening, Simon.

BO-PEEP: Wasn't Mother Hubbard with you in the passage?

SIMPLE SIMON: She was--she was--she assuredly was. But just at the door here she heard the telusphone-bell ring, and so she ran away again--ran--away again.

JACK HORNER: And how did you get into the house without our seeing you?

SIMPLE SIMON: I don't know. I must have mistook the back door for the front. I reckon--'pears to me-

BOY BLUE: *I* believe you saw some pies through the kitchen window, and just *went* for them.

JACK HORNER: Pies? Pies? Say, I want one! Has Simon got them?

SIMPLE SIMON: Indeed, I haven't any.

BOY BLUE: So we've heard before.

MISTRESS MARY: Now, boys, don't tease Simon; and, Jack, don't be so greedy. What I want to ask Simon is this: Has Mother Hubbard told you what we are all to do for her here tonight?

SIMPLE SIMON: No, she has not--assuredly not. She said to me: "Simon, you've come in the wrong

door." And I says: "Yes, ma'am; thank you kindly, ma'am." And she says: "Come, Simon; I'll show you where the others are. I'm ready to go to them now, poor things!" And then in the hall she heard the telusphone-bell, and she said: "Oh, deary me! Get them to sing another song, Simon. You sing a song with them, Simon; and I'll be there in a minute--in a minute."

ALL: A song! Simon will sing a song!

BOY BLUE: Yes; and we'll join in.

SIMON'S SONG:

If I had a penny,--
A single little penny,--
I would go at once and buy a pie--buy a pie.
But I've just got a nickel--

OTHERS: (*Jestingly.*)
Well, you *are* in a pickle!

SIMON: (*Seriously.*)
Yes, a nickel's not the price of a pie.

OTHERS:
From your nickel take a penny,
And buy one pie or many.

SIMON:
Oh, no, no! 't is a sum too hard and high!
I never learned subtraction,
And before I'd solve a fraction
I'd go for weeks without a taste of pie--oh, my!

OTHERS: (*Laughing.*)
Ho, ho! But this is funny;
You'll never spend your money
Unless you have a piece that's just the price!

SIMON: (*Triumphantly.*)
Yes, I've a plan, my sages:
I'll ask for penny wages!
And that'll be so handy and so nice--so very nice!

(*Mother Hubbard enters at last, followed by Jack, Jill, and Little Miss Muffet.*)

MOTHER HUBBARD: Well, boys and girls, how do you do? It is just too bad I have had to keep you waiting so long. But I heard you singing, and knew you were having a good time; and when I heard Mistress Mary's sweet voice I felt quite easy, for I was sure she wouldn't let you get into any mischief.

BOY BLUE: We have been amusing ourselves very well, Mother Hubbard.

BO-PEEP: Yes; but we are *dying* to know why you have asked us all to meet here tonight.

MOTHER HUBBARD: Can't any of you guess? Jack Horner, now, he's a keen lad. What does he think?

JACK HORNER: (*Dubiously.*) It isn't--it couldn't--it hasn't anything to do with can--candy, has it?

MOTHER HUBBARD: Oh, ho! So that's the way your mind runs, is it? (*She looks at him sharply, and then at the cupboard, toward which she goes a step or two.*) There hasn't any one been peeping into my cupboard, has there?

JACK HORNER: (*Slipping behind Mistress Mary.*) I--I haven't! It's locked!

MISTRESS MARY: (*Laughing and patting Jack's head.*) You know we wouldn't expect to find anything *there*, Mother Hubbard!

MOTHER HUBBARD: You wouldn't, eh? Well, there's something better than bones in that closet tonight. Children, what night is this?

(*They look at each other.*)

MISS MUFFET: Christmas Eve!

ALL: (*Echoing Miss Muffet.*) Christmas Eve!

MOTHER HUBBARD: And who is it comes visiting about on Christmas Eve?

(*All look at each other again.*)

BOY BLUE: Santa Claus!

ALL: (*Echoing Boy Blue.*) Santa Claus!

MOTHER HUBBARD: Exactly so. And now let me tell you he will be here, in this house, in this room, in a very few minutes. (*Sensation.*) There has been some delay, and I have been telephoning and telegraphing to him all the evening. At six o'clock he left the North Pole, at seven he was rushing along through Canada, at eight he had visited all the northern United States, and by this time he is coming straight for this house.

BOY BLUE: But I thought he didn't let anyone see him on his trips.

MOTHER HUBBARD: No, not ordinary people, my boy; but Mother Goose people are not ordinary people; and, besides, you have all been asked to come here to help him.

BO-PEEP: To help him? Help Santa Claus? How could *we* help Santa Claus?

MOTHER HUBBARD: That he will tell you himself when he comes. Hark! Did I hear bells?

MISTRESS MARY: I hear nothing yet. Let us sing a song of welcome to help bring him.

ALL: *(Sing.)*
Santa Claus is coming!
Joyful is the cry.
Spread by happy voices,
How the tidings fly!
All the air is humming
With the glad refrain,
Santa Claus is coming!
Shout it once again!

(A faint sound of sleigh-bells grows nearer and nearer. A voice is heard without, above the bells: "Whoa, there, Donner! Hold up, Blitzen! Whoa, Dancer! Whoa, Prancer! Here we are!" Santa Claus enters.)

SANTA CLAUS: Yes, here we are at old Mother Hubbard's; and here are all the lads and lassies come to meet us!

MISTRESS MAY: And to help you, Santa Claus. Mother Hubbard says we can help you.

SANTA CLAUS: And so you can--so you can. Bless your sweet face! Now, here's a likely lad. *(Laying hold of Jack, who has kept close to Mistress Mary.)* He can help, I know. And what would you like for Christmas, my fine fellow?

JACK HORNER: A large Christmas pie, sir, very full of plums.

SANTA CLAUS: Ho, ho! A modest wish, surely, for one of your size! But, boys and girls, *your* presents are to come last. You shall have them all in good time, but first comes what you are to do for me. And now I want you all to come near and listen very seriously, for I am going to tell you a sad, sad thing.

(All gather about him with breathless attention. Santa Claus surveys them with a mournful shake of the head.)

SANTA CLAUS: *(Solemnly, bending toward them.)* Santa Claus is growing old!

(They start back, surprised, and look at each other doubtfully a moment.)

BOY BLUE: *(Bluntly.)* Why, Santa Claus, we thought you always were old.

SANTA CLAUS: *(Feigning indignation.)* Hey? Whatd'ye say? Always old, indeed! Who would have thought of such impertinence!

BO-PEEP: *(Defending Boy Blue.)* I am sure your hair and beard have always been as white as they are now.

SANTA CLAUS: And what of that? My hair turned white when I was a mere stripling, just with the care and brain-fag of inventing new Christmas toys every year for all you boys and girls. But lately I

have felt I am really growing old, because--now, don't go telling this to everybody--because I am not so spry as I used to be. It takes em a few minutes longer every year to make my rounds--which is *most* mortifying to my pride.

BOY BLUE: But there are more children and chimneys than there used to be, Santa Claus.

BO-PEEP: And so many more toys for you to carry.

SANTA CLAUS: (*Delighted.*) Why, bless your hearts, so there are! The lad is a well-spoken lad, after all. He'll not be caught napping under a haymow or anywhere else again, I warrant you. And this little lady doesn't go wool-gathering nowadays, I'll be bound. Yes, there *are* more chimneys, and a heavier pack means a stronger back; and both my back and legs get a little shaky now at Christmas. Last year it took me the whole of January, tucked up in bed, to get over my jaunt on Christmas Eve. And so, boys and girls, I have sent for you this year to help me do my work.

ALL: How? How?

BOY BLUE: Won't it be fun? Hurrah!

BO-PEEP: (*Hurriedly.*) What shall we do first? Where shall we begin?

SANTA CLAUS: Softly, softly. No hurry, no excitement! I have been all through the North, visited the Eskimos and the Frozen Northites--

JACK: Oh, Santa Claus, *do* tell us! *Who* lives at the North Pole, and how do you get there? There are so many people who want to know!

SANTA CLAUS: Oh, yes; I know all about your Pearys and your Nansens and your Andrees, and all who have tried to find the Pole since the days Kane was not able. Brave men they, but deluded--deluded. Now, you can just tell any one who would really like to know (*the boys have drawn near, attentively*) that *I* live at the North Pole, and I *never gossip about my neighbors!* And as for the way to get there, the only way to be *sure* of reaching the Pole is (*close attention again from the boys*) to go behind a team of reindeer *just* like mine; and *mine* are *not* for sale! (*Crestfallen looks, while Santa Claus wags his head triumphantly.*) Now, what I was about to say was this: you boys and girls are to go with me the rest of the way tonight, and help me distribute my pack--be so many feet and fingers for me.

ALL: What fun! Hurrah!

JACK: How will you take us all?

SANTA CLAUS: In my sleigh. Where there's room for a million or more of Christmas gifts a few boys and girls won't count.

BOY BLUE: Hurrah! Where shall we go first?

SANTA CLAUS: We must finish the United States. There are all the coast towns to do, and a perfect grist of Sunday-schools in every one of them. We'll do those first. And I have laid up a special little store of presents for them here at Mother Hubbard's. Now, Mother Hubbard, if you have the key we will take a look into that cupboard of yours.

MOTHER HUBBARD: (*Advancing proudly and smilingly, key in hand.*) Yes, the presents are in my cupboard, children. It is bare no longer. (*Throws open the door, and shows the shelves filled with parcels.*) What do you think of that?

SANTA CLAUS: Yes, what do you say to that? I say it's worth a song.

JACK AND JILL: A song! A song!

MISTRESS MARY: A song for Mother Hubbard!

MISS MUFFET: Let me join in the chorus.

SIMPLE SIMON: We'll *all* sing--all of it--sharps, flats, accidentals, and all.

JACK HORNER: Sing it to *my* tune.

BO-PEEP: (*Impatiently.*) But have we time--have we time, Santa Claus?

SANTA CLAUS: Time? Let me tell you, my girl, when Santa Claus stops on Christmas Eve, and just so long as he stops, all the clocks stop, too. They wouldn't dare get ahead of him that way.

BOY BLUE: All right, then. A song for Mother Hubbard, to Jack Horner's tune!

Old Mother Hubbard
Goes to the cupboard
To look for her Christmas store.
She puts in the key
As proud as can be,
And cries, "It is empty no more!"

SANTA CLAUS: Now all go and get your loads.

(*They crowd about the cupboard, and Mother Hubbard fills their arms with packages, books, boxes of candy, etc.*)

MISTRESS MARY: (*During this distribution.*) Another verse!

Old Mother Hubbard
Shows us the cupboard,
Full from the bottom to top.
She loads all the boys
And girls with her toys
Till they cry, "Mother Hubbard, pray stop!"

SANTA CLAUS: All out? All loaded? All ready? Then let us make for the sleigh. Form a line, youngsters. Shan't we have a jolly time! All down the coast--over to Europe--Asia--Isia--Osia--and Africa! What a night of it!

MOTHER HUBBARD: And where first?

SANTA CLAUS: First to (*Here may be inserted a reference to the school or other company before which the play is presented.*) Some of this special lot of bundles is for them. Forward, march!

MISTRESS MARY: One minute, boys! First a song for Santa!

BOY BLUE:
Santa Claus forever!

JACK HORNER:
Hurrah!

Santa Claus forever,
Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!
Friend of the children,
Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!

(Santa Claus and his assistants descend among the audience and distribute the gifts prepared for them.)

CURTAIN