

Snow Day

Jack and Hanna woke up slowly. They stretched, yawned, and rubbed their eyes. It was nice to sleep in. Wait a minute – sleep in? Wasn't it a school day? The clock confirmed it -- they had overslept. They bounced out of bed, their feet hitting the hand-planed oak flooring with a thump. Quickly, they pulled hand-knitted sweaters over their heads and dashed to the breakfast table. Hanna was still combing her hair and Jack had a toothbrush stuck in his mouth as they clattered down the stairs.

The kids were met with the sight of a very relaxed Kate, curled up in a vintage afghan on a wicker love seat near the window. She was still in her flannel robe with a Santa mug full of fragrant fresh-brewed coffee in her hands. "Slow down, kids," she said, "Take a look outside." They followed her gaze – outside, everything was white, as far as the eye could see. Snow fell steadily from the sky, big fat flakes landing on top of more big, flat flakes. They rushed to the window. The bushes in the front yard were totally covered and starting to melt into the landscape. The mailbox at the end of the driveway was nearly buried by drifts of creamy white snow. The evergreens were bowing with the weight of the snowfall, their green tips looking rich against the white. A single bright red cardinal landed on the dark brown split rail fence across the street, the colors beautiful against the snowy landscape. "Snowed in?" they asked with delight. "Snowed in," Kate confirmed. "And I've got an idea."

The next few hours, they were all very busy. They started with the garden room, Kate's favorite spot in the whole house. Normally, she used it to start seeds and to transplant her favorite perennials. Today, it would serve a different purpose. They began by clearing the potting benches and big, central farm table that serves as a worktable. Then, they went in search of the perfect supplies. From the dried herbs, they pulled plants of green, bronze, brown, moss and red. They dug through the old chest of fabric samples, pulling out bright pieces of felt and fabric. Then it was off on a search for scissors, glue, twine, and pencils. Finally, they gathered in their new holiday workspace, ready to create wonderfully simple handmade gifts and ornaments. Kate sighed happily. With three glass walls, it was the perfect spot to watch the falling snow as they worked.

They cut wonderful Christmas figures out of the felt, working with precision. With the garden for inspiration and the lovely falling snow adding a sense of contentment, they worked on mini garlands and wreaths, and created candleholders that reminded them of the topiaries just outside the garden room door. The topiaries sparked with white lights, twinkling through the snow.

Kate took a big piece of rag-edged paper and wrote on it: "Our family's most perfect Santa Claus." As the day wore on, each of them added something new. A snowy white beard. A thick red jacket. The perfect hat. Finally, it was time for a break. Kate propped the Santa picture up on an easel and they all pulled on snowsuits, boots, hats, and mittens for a romp in the fresh snow.

Outside, they couldn't help but notice how festive the garden room looked. They looked through the frosted window to see their beautiful creations, carefully displayed on the worktable. Pieces of red felt and fragrant green herbs covered the potting tables. Glue and scissors stood ready for more fun. And there, on the easel, was the perfect family Santa, one mittened hand raised in a greeting.

"Guess it's the kind of day Santa would like, huh Mom?" asked Jack. "Oh I think so, Jack," said Kate as she looked at her family with love. "Santa *loves* snow days."

The Christmas Story

Hanna burst through the front door, the golden bells on the deep green wreath jingling her arrival. "Mom!" she called excitedly, "we read the greatest story in school today." Kate helped Hanna pull off her snow-covered boots, coat, hat, and mittens, then set a steaming mug of hot cocoa down in front of her rosy-cheeked daughter. "OK, now," Kate said with laughter in her eyes, "tell me about the story."

Hanna told Kate about the classic tale of Ebenezer Scrooge and how alive all the characters felt to her. Then, her face fell. "I felt so sorry for Tiny Tim, Mom. But Scrooge made everything all right and they had a beautiful feast! Do you think we could do something like that for someone?" Kate's eyes filled with tears. "You want to do something nice for someone else this Christmas?" "Oh, yes, Mom," Hanna said, becoming more and more excited. "Let's help someone have the best Christmas feast ever!"

That night, the family sat around their beautifully-weathered antique farm table and had a meeting. Outside, the glistening snow fell gently, lightly covering the three fragrant, deep green pine trees at the end of their long driveway, each decorated with a single, twinkling star. Inside, they gathered over a large piece of craft paper, markers and pencils in hand. "We'll transform the great room into a beautiful Christmas banquet!" Kate said, sketching quickly. "And we'll invite our friends and family to come and donate money so a poor family can have a wonderful Christmas," Hanna added. Kate said, "We'll serve rich, royal purple plum pudding, roasted turkey served on Great Grandma's antique bronze platter, and a beautiful, burgundy cranberry sauce . . . what's that noise?" Everyone turned to look at Jack. "It's my stomach growling, Mom," he said sheepishly. "All this talk about food is making me hungry!"

The night of the feast was cold and crisp, the full moon casting a beautiful light on the rich old brick of their restored farmhouse and the fresh snow around it. The guests began to arrive, walking through the snow to a front porch decorated with yards of crushed velvet bows, glittering votive candles, and Christmas evergreen tied with silk ribbons. As instructed, everyone came dressed in period costume, just as in the story. Kate, Sam, Hanna and Jack greeted their guests in the foyer, hanging their wraps on hooks under a mirror in a gold-kissed frame, then escorted them into the great room, transformed in deep, jewel-toned colors of burgundy red, Christmas evergreen, cobalt blue, royal purple, and glittering gold. The table shone with the promise of good food to come, the Christmas tree sparkled with tiny white lights and heirloom glass and glitter ornaments. At each place was a gold-trimmed envelope labeled, "Gifts for the Tiny Tim in all of us."

It was a beautiful night in a beautiful setting. As Kate turned with love to invite her guests to the table, she felt she had everything she would ever want. "It's time for the feast!" she announced to the room, then added, "What's that noise?"

Everyone turned to look at Jack. "It's my stomach growling, Mom," he said sheepishly. "Let's eat!"