

**GEORGE WASHINGTON
JONES: A
CHRISTMAS GIFT
THAT WENT A-BEGGING**

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George Washington Jones: A Christmas Gift That Went a-Begging by Ruth McEnergy Stuart

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CHAPTER I

MERRY CHRISTMAS

IT is sad to be little and poor and black,
and to have no relations.

It is sad at any time, but on Christmas it seems even more so, for at this blessed season all the blessed things of life appear to count for more than on ordinary days.

Little George Washington Jones waked

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early on Christmas morning, and he saw the stockings stuffed with toys hanging before the mantel—but he lay very still. He did not feel like getting up.

Even when the other children waked and began scrambling for their stockings, he kept his eyes shut and did not move, although he did really peep with the eye next the blanket—just to see what they were getting.

He peeped as long as it did any good to peep; but one can't see anything when tears keep coming and coming, and so after awhile George just closed his eyes, and did n't try to see any more.

But he could hear. He heard Pete's tin horn even before he heard Pete say, "Hello! List'n at my ho'n!" And presently he heard little wheels rattling on the floor, and a drum, and after a while there were loud reports of a toy pistol,

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and he smelled the powder, and he said to himself, "I hears Christmas—an' I smells it, too!" which just about expressed it.

And he cried softly—'way down in his little stomach under the blankets.

George stayed in bed as long as he dared—until he smelled the bacon frying for breakfast, in fact—and then, of course, he had to get up, and he made a brave effort to behave in as natural a way as possible, and not to show that he felt lonely. Indeed, when he went into the kitchen, where the family were, and he saw all the children's new Christmas things, he *tried* to be pleased.

And so he was—in a way—but his lip would n't quite behave itself and stop trembling. And then when little Tom's mother, Caroline, said to him, "Let George blow yo' horn a little while,

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son," he could n't blow it to save his life.

And when they all saw how he felt, and little Luce Ann broke all the stomach out of her candy cow and gave it to him, and M'ria Jane offered to let him play her jew's-harp, and even the baby, seeing that something was wrong, toddled up and wanted to kiss him, he suddenly started to bawl aloud.

And then he was ashamed of bawling, and began wiping his eyes on his sleeves and saying "Dog-gone!" to try to appear more manly.

And then old Uncle Ben called him over to where he sat and patted him on the head, and said, "Don't fret, honey. Gord knows best," which was the worst of all, as it reminded him that his grandfather had died only three days before, and that he had n't a relation in the

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world, and was only staying with "Aunt Caroline," who was n't his real aunt at all, just for a few days, "until something could be done for him."

His grandfather had often spoken to him of "going home," and told him he might have to go suddenly, and that his little grandson would be lonely for a time—but that, after a while, "it would pass off."

And he warned him that he would almost surely have hard times—for a while—harder than he himself had ever had, because, as he expressed it, he had "lived in clover" all his life.

He had been selected by his master from five hundred field hands, in the old slave days, and sent as a Christmas gift to the loveliest and sweetest mistress in all the world.

This was when he was a tiny boy,