

A CHRISTMAS STORY FOR DOG LOVERS

Long ago in the deepest of winters all of the animals on Earth were abuzz with the news.

"HE IS BORN! HE IS BORN!" cried the snowy owl.

"Come one and all, rejoice!" roared the mighty lion. "Bring gifts to the new King!"

The forest grew bright with the din of excitement. Every creature was running towards the star. The noise was so loud and joyful that it travelled distant lands. In a quiet glen, under a bramble bush, a small lonely dog raised his head from his slumber and heard the sounds from afar.

He raised his little head and wondered. Slowly he raised his tired body and sniffed the air. He knew something was amiss - but he knew not what. A voice ever so sweet was singing in the distance, this he could hear. The words were not at all clear, but the sound was of waterfalls, and misty mornings and everything dear... Eagerly he followed the sound and soon saw a star. It shone so brightly his little eyes watered. What was this shiny thing that happily glowed? What could be happening that would bring about such a lovely sight?

His little legs beat the path for many days. He became tired and hungry but still he walked on. He had to follow the sound of that voice: The voice that reminded him of warmer and kinder times. He had to follow the light of the star. The star told him of happy things to come. At last he came into a clearing and his eyes beheld a mystifying sight. Animals were everywhere, and each had a precious gift. Some brought shiny berries from the forest, some brought beautiful leaves; some brought twigs from the rarest of trees and even some brought the most precious wildflowers of the fields. They were laying these gifts at the entrance of a stable. Above the stable the light of the star twinkled more brightly than before.

He turned to the deer and asked: "What is all this? Where have I come?"

"You have come to see the new King. He is born. Where are your gifts for the child?" asked the deer reproachfully.

"I have no gifts. I didn't know..." said the lonely little dog with his head hung low.

The deer sneered and snubbed and quickly walked away as he tossed his head indignantly. The little dog's body trembled all over, his little tail flew between his little legs, and his little head hung lower than ever. He was ashamed.

And yet...he still wanted to get a little peek at the New King. Quietly, ever so carefully, he crept over to the stable. He was so small he could easily hide under the other animals. Ever so sleekly he crept up to the manger and peeked inside.

"WHO ARE YOU!" boomed the voice of the Lion. "WHY DO YOU DARE NOT BRING GIFTS FOR THE NEW KING?" and the little dog cowered, much humbled. He laid his little head at the foot of the manger and hid his eyes. He was ready to be killed by the Lion, and yet he spoke ever so quietly, ever so meekly, ever so bravely: "I have no gifts, I have no berries, or twigs, or bright flowers of the field...all I have is my life and I will gladly give that, for I have shamed all my brethren tonight."

He waited - with his eyes closed, thinking that if he did die tonight, at least he would die beneath the cradle of his King. That's when a warm and gentle hand was upon him. He did not dare to open his eyes, until he heard a woman's voice speak: "Do not fear little one. You are safe here. This bramble in your fur speaks of the gift you have brought to him." The lonely little dog opened

his eyes and looked up at the woman.

"But I have no gift to offer, save for myself, and that is very little..." he shyly protested.

The woman smiled and scratched his ears. "Little dog, you travelled far to see the King. That is gift enough when it comes from your heart. What gift is more precious than one given in innocence and humility? No little one, you are welcome here." As she spoke she raised the little dog up.

"Behold, your King, the Son of Man. You shall serve him well." And the baby smiled.

So it came to pass and dog was lonely no more.

And dog has served man ever since, loyal to a fault, and humble he remains.

A gift from God to us, for who, but dog will travel miles without explanation? Who, but dog will cower from you even if he is not wrong?

Who, but dog will take a scolding even when he is not to blame? Who, but dog is content to die at our feet if he so must?

Let us care for it well.

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