# *The Story of The Christmas Guest*

***by Helen Steiner Rice***

*It happened one day at the year's white end,*
*Two neighbors called on an old-time friend*

*And they found his shop so meager and mean,*
*Made merry with a thousand boughs of green,*

*And Conrad was sitting with face a-shine*
*When he suddenly stopped as he stitched a twine*

*And said, "Old friends, at dawn today,*
*When the cock was crowing the night away,*

*The Lord appeared in a dream to me*
*And said, 'I am coming your guest to be.'*

*So I've been busy with feet astir,*
*Strewing my shop with branches of fir,*

*The table is spread and the kettle is shined*
*And over the rafters the holly is twined,*

*And now I will wait for my Lord to appear*
*And listen closely so I will hear*

*His step as He nears my humble place,*
*And I open the door and look in His face."*

*So his friends went home and left Conrad alone,*
*For this was the happiest day he had known,*

*For, long since, his family had passed away*
*And Conrad has spent a sad Christmas Day.*

*But he knew with the Lord as his Christmas guest*
*This Christmas would be the dearest and best,*

*And he listened with only joy in his heart.*
*And with every sound he would rise with a start*

*And look for the Lord to be standing there*
*In answer to his earnest prayer*

*So he ran to the window after hearing a sound,*
*But all that he saw on the snow-covered ground*

*Was a shabby beggar whose shoes were torn*
*And all of his clothes were ragged and worn.*

*So Conrad was touched and went to the door*
*And he said, "Your feet must be frozen and sore,*

*And I have some shoes in my shop for you*
*And a coat that will keep you warmer, too."*

*So with grateful heart the man went away,*
*But as Conrad noticed the time of day*

*He wondered what made the dear Lord so late*
*And how much longer he'd have to wait,*

*When he heard a knock and ran to the door,*
*But it was only a stranger once more,*

*A bent, old crone with a shawl of black,*
*A bundle of kindling piled on her back.*

*She asked for only a place to rest,*
*But that was reserved for Conrad's Great Guest.*

*But her voice seemed to plead, "Don't send me away*
*Let me rest awhile on Christmas day."*

*So Conrad brewed her a steaming cup*
*And told her to sit at the table and sip.*

*But after she left he was filled with dismay*
*For he saw that the hours were passing away*

*And the Lord had not come as He said He would,*
*And Conrad felt sure he had misunderstood.*

*When out of the stillness he heard a cry,*
*"Please help me and tell me where am I."*

*So again he opened his friendly door*
*And stood disappointed as twice before,*

*It was only a child who had wandered away*
*And was lost from her family on Christmas Day.*

*Again Conrad's heart was heavy and sad,*
*But he knew he should make this little child glad,*

*So he called her in and wiped her tears*
*And quieted her childish fears.*

*Then he led her back to her home once more*
*But as he entered his own darkened door,*

*He knew that the Lord was not coming today*
*For the hours of Christmas had passed away.*

*So he went to his room and knelt down to pray*
*And he said, "Dear Lord, why did you delay?*

*What kept You from coming to call on me,*
*For I wanted so much Your face to see."*

*When soft in the silence a voice he heard,*
*"Lift up your head, for I kept My word –*

*Three times My shadow crossed your floor –*
*Three times I came to your lonely door –*

*For I was the beggar with bruised, cold feet,*
*I was the woman you gave to eat,*
*And I was the child on the homeless street.*

*Three times I knocked and three times I came in,*
*And each time I found the warmth of a friend.*

*Of all the gifts, love is the best,*
*And I was honored to be your Christmas Guest."*