

NO, SIR-REE, you don't catch me giving anything to Christmas charity. No, sir-ree! It's all nonsense anyway," said old Mr. Long-Tail as he slammed his door shut with a great bang right in the face of a startled snowbird who had called to solicit a contribution for the Christmas fund for the poor and needy.

Then with a frown he turned, drawing his old padded dressing gown more closely about him, and hobbled over to his large easy-chair before the blazing fire. Seating himself among its cushions he proceeded to pour out a steaming bowl of broth from a copper pot and to help himself to a bit of toast from a trivet before the fire.

"Ha, ha!" he squeaked. "This is pretty snug," and his lips curled into a satisfied smile as he glanced over to where the boisterous snowflakes were dashing against the window pane.

"Who-o-o! Who-o-o!" whistled the cold North Wind as it rattled the shutters.

"Crackety-crackety," answered back the leaping flames in the grate with a merry shower of sparks.

Yes, Mr. Long-Tail was snug—very, very snug. His comfortable little house fairly glowed with warmth, and its pantry shelves sagged under their weight of good things. So, on this cold winter's day, the Day-Before-Christmas, he of all the many forest folk could afford to scoff and shoo away unwelcome callers. For why should he worry about the needy and the cold. His shelves were full and his fire was warm. Besides, did he not have many store-houses filled to overflowing?

But many there were in the great world who were not as free from worry as Mr. Long-Tail. Many days of heavy storms and cruel winds had drifted the snow and covered fields and forests alike with a thick white mantle which, freezing, had made it almost impossible for many little creatures to reach their hidden stores or to find a stray berry.

For weeks past they had been watching and waiting in the hope of better weather. Christmas was drawing near, and they had planned a grand celebration around a great fir tree which grew on a lofty knoll at the very edge of the forest. They had planned to trim it from top to bottom with long garlands of holly, while myriads of blazing candles would glisten and sparkle as they shed their light upon boughs heavily laden with presents.

Then one day came Bad Weather, and with him a great blizzard which howled and shrieked and added huge drifts of snow. The little forest people looked out from their windows to see the blizzard imps dancing in glee, and as days went by they slowly gave up hope of the great Christmas celebration. Many tiny creatures watched their store-houses of provisions gradually disappear under the snow, and each day saw the list of the needy increase.

SO THE Day-Before-Christmas found every little eye carrying a look of worry and every little voice sobbed: "We can do but little for this Christmas, and that only for the very poor"; all but old Mr. Long-Tail. His eyes held no look of worry. He was in a class by himself, for, as sometimes happens, not any of his store-houses were buried and every snowflake that fell before his door seemed to be instantly whisked away by the North Wind.

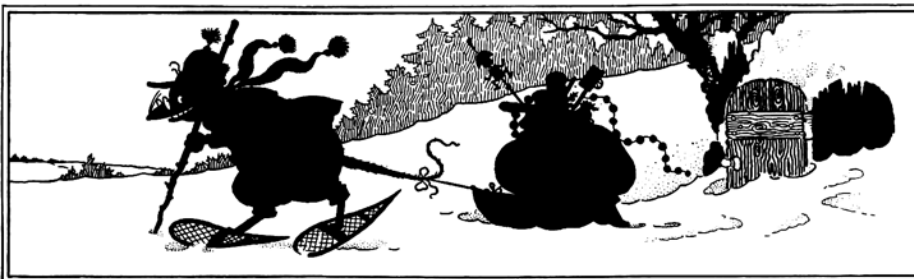
And so he sat before his fire and drank his broth and wheezed in his most disagreeable voice: "Christmas! Bah! I'll have none of it!"

For to explain: Old Mr. Long-Tail was a rat, and a very miserly one at that. In fact, he traced his pedigree directly back to the great family of Miser Rats, who had a habit of gathering hoards of curious things and tucking them away in funny little store-houses where one could find everything from an old button to a bit of brightly colored glass, along with queer dried roots and vegetables. Old Mr. Long-Tail had lived a long time and, as he had likewise inherited the family traits, his store-houses were many.

So he sat all alone the Day-Before-Christmas, buried in his great armchair, and thought only of how very comfortable he was—he, the very richest creature in the great forest.

But old Mr. Long-Tail was not happy, for with all his great riches there was one thing more he longed for—that was a certain kind of yellow corn, and that corn was hidden away in a certain corn bin in a certain old barn a goodly distance away.

"Ah! If I only had a little of that fine corn for my Christmas dinner," sighed old Mr. Long-Tail, for secretly he did intend to celebrate Christmas Day, but all by himself.



How Old Mr. Long-Tail Became a Santa Claus

By HARRISON CADY

Finally he went to the window and peered out. "Whew! It's a pretty rough day, but I believe I might make it," he exclaimed as he drew on his big coat and wound his woolen scarf about his neck. Then he threw an empty sack over his shoulder and, buckling on a pair of snowshoes, headed straight for that distant barn.

Reaching it after a very long and difficult trip, he removed his snowshoes and crawled under the old building until he came to a convenient crack in the floor, and raising himself carefully he crept noiselessly within. Everything was silent and deserted except for the groaning of the wind about the eaves. Mr. Long-Tail lost no time in getting across the floor to a large wooden bin beside the wall, and he sped quickly along its side until he came to an opening, and then, with a hurried look over his shoulder, he stepped inside—not inside the bin, but right into a large box trap, the cover of which dropped with a thunderous clap, and old Mr. Long-Tail found himself a prisoner.



IT WAS all so sudden and unexpected that it quite took his breath away. He tried to find a

way of escape, but there was no escape for old Mr. Long-Tail. Exhausted, he crouched down and moaned "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I'm caught! I'm caught!" and his falling tears went splash as they fell on the floor of his prison.

Yes; he was caught, and caught so well that unless something unforeseen happened he was doomed to spend his Christmas Day in that box trap. Poor old Mr. Long-Tail, who had planned to celebrate all alone with a delicious feast!

One hour passed; then another; then many more followed, and Mr. Long-Tail commenced to feel cold and hungry—yes, hungry right in that terrible trap in that well-filled corn bin. He shivered and shivered until the old box trap fairly made the corn rattle.

"Hush! Hush! What's that?" whispered one little snowbird to another as they huddled under the eaves of the old barn. "I hear sumfin."

Just then old Mr. Long-Tail gave a low moan.

"Whew! Someone is in distress," cried the little snowbirds together as they cocked their heads to one side and listened.

Again came a moan.

"Whew! Some poor soul is in distress and we must help him."

And those two little snowbirds spread their wings and went whirling down to a window sill, and finding a broken pane they poked their heads in and listened until they heard the sob again.

Then they both peeped loudly: "Who's there?"



Faintly from the bin came a plaintive cry: "Help! Help! It's me, poor Mr. Long-Tail."

The two little snowbirds without hesitation flew right into the old barn and commenced to investigate.

"It's old Mr. Long-Tail all right," said one as he spied the tip of the rat's tail protruding from the end of the box.

"Oh! So you are the crabbed old fellow who shooed us away from your door this morning," said the other upon recognizing Mr. Long-Tail's voice.

Mr. Long-Tail sobbed: "Set me free, and anything I own is yours."

"WE ARE going to set you free all right," cried the little birds, "but we don't want anything of yours. No, sir. We only accept presents from

willing givers, and just to show you, we are going to return good for evil." And straightway they began to dig those yellow ears of corn from under the old box trap. Suddenly it fell on its side and the cover opened enough for Mr. Long-Tail to slip out. He didn't stop, and he didn't even thank those little snowbirds for saving his life. No. He only ran just as fast as his legs would carry him straight for his home.

"My! That was a narrow escape," he puffed as he bolted his heavy door. "You don't catch me leaving this snug little house again"; and he stirred the fire and dropped down into his big easy-chair.

For a long, long time he sat and looked into the crackling flames as they danced and leaped up the chimney. Then gradually old Mr. Long-Tail commenced to see strange shapes. Curious visions appeared—visions new and strange; and along with them came troubling thoughts, and, do all he could, he couldn't shut them out.

As the flames danced they shaped themselves into weird pictures of huddled creatures bent with cold and hunger, as they drew their cloaks about them. He could hear the roar of the winter tempest; he saw lines of empty stockings and heard plaintive calls for food. Then he saw a score of rich store-houses filled to overflowing, with doors heavily barred, while before them walked a grotesque figure, and that figure was turning away groups of starving forest folk. And, last of all, he saw two tiny snowbirds helping someone out of a trap, someone who whined and whimpered and cried: "Help! Help! It's me, poor Mr. Long-Tail."

This was too much for him. He jumped suddenly to his feet and cried: "That's me, a mean old miser, who does nothing for anyone but himself. The poor and needy I turn away, and I don't even thank those who save my life—me, poor old Miser Long-Tail."

Ashamed and humbled he sat down again and remained motionless for a long, long time. Then, with a sudden cry of joy, he jumped to his feet and looked at the clock.

"HURRAH! There's yet time. There are still a few hours left," he cried as he drew on his coat and, gathering a pile of empty bags together, he disappeared into the night.

The Night-Before-Christmas!

That magic hour of all the year when Santa Claus, behind his team of reindeer steeds, rides hither and thither from one chimney top to another. But on this particular night the little creatures of the great forest had given up all hope of any Christmas visitor and were huddled in their beds for warmth. They were fast asleep, dreaming their troubled dreams of empty shelves and stockings. Outside the great world lay covered with ice and snow, for the blizzard had gone on its way and a cold winter moon shone on the hanging icicles.

Then suddenly there came, at the exact hour of twelve, the ringing of a bell. The little people awoke with a start and in excited voices cried: "It's a Christmas bell! It's a Christmas bell!"

In a flash they were out of their beds, and hurriedly dressing, they scampered toward the echoing bell.

And what do you suppose they saw?

A smiling old rat who, with the aid of his long tail, was ringing the bell! While before him on the ground was spread a wonderful collection of Christmas gifts, and above all was the sign:

PEACE ON EARTH
AND GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN
A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!
FROM MR. LONG-TAIL



If you wish to see how old Mr. Long-Tail became a Santa Claus, print the color pictures on cardstock. Or print out the pictures on regular paper and mount the cut-outs on some lightweight cardboard using paste or glue. Cut carefully around the tabs at the dotted lines and bend them back so the pictures will stand upright. Line up the pictures as shown above.