



“Mrs. Jolly's Christmas Guest” A Story Adapted from the Short Play by Frederick Passmore. Copyright 2025.

Mrs. Mary Jolly hummed softly to herself as she moved about her brightly decorated living room, her Sunday best dress crisp and festive. At her age, a retired schoolteacher still carried the cheerful energy that had earned her the perfect last name when she married decades ago. With her husband gone these ten years, Christmas had become a quieter affair, but tonight her son Tom, his wife, and the grandchildren were coming. The thought filled her with a bright, bubbling joy.

She arranged a few more small wrapped gifts under the glowing Christmas tree, then settled into a comfortable chair with fresh paper and ribbons. The tree lights twinkled, the lamps cast a warm glow, and the house smelled of pine and anticipation. When the doorbell chimed a cheerful carol, she hurried to answer it, a wide smile already blooming.

The smile faltered the instant the door opened.

Instead of Tom’s family, her neighbor Matilda swept in with an enthusiastic hug. The woman had moved in only a few months earlier, and Mrs. Jolly had been kind—perhaps too kind. Matilda never waited for invitations.

“Oh, Mary, I saw your lights and just knew you shouldn’t be alone on Christmas Eve!” Matilda declared, already shrugging off her coat. She handed over a small wrapped package. “I brought you a little something. It’s a lighthouse—thought it might brighten your windowsill.”

Mrs. Jolly took the gift distractedly. “That’s... very thoughtful, Matilda. Thank you.” She set it on the coffee table without opening it. Her mind raced for a polite way to hurry her neighbor along.

Matilda settled comfortably onto the loveseat as if she planned to stay all evening. “I didn’t bother cooking a big dinner—just some leftovers for me. No sense making a fuss when it’s only one person. You know, I’ve never quite understood all the excitement about that baby born so long ago. How did those wise men even know to travel to another country before He was born? And why do we make such a big deal of His birthday when most folks forget about Him the rest of the year?”

Mrs. Jolly nodded vaguely, only half-listening as she resumed wrapping the grandchildren’s gifts. She placed another bright bow with mechanical precision, her irritation growing. The phone rang at last, and she nearly leapt for it.

It was Tom. “We’re just down the road, Mom. Pulling in any minute.”

Relief flooded her. She hung up, fetched Matilda’s coat, and pressed it into her hands with a determined smile. “My family will be here any second. I’m sure you’ll want to get back and enjoy your own evening.”

Matilda looked uncertain, reluctant to leave, but Mrs. Jolly gently guided her toward the door, one hand on her arm. “Merry Christmas, dear!” she called brightly as she closed the door behind her. The moment the latch clicked, Mrs. Jolly turned, clasped her hands, looked heavenward, and let out a deep, theatrical sigh of relief.

She bustled about the room, straightening cushions, flicking a speck of dust from an end table, and adjusting a strand of lights on the tree. The doorbell chimed again. This time her face lit up with pure delight.

Tom and his wife stepped inside, bundled in coats, laughing and stamping snow from their boots. The children burst in behind them—a bright-eyed boy of about ten and his younger sister, six or seven, already chattering over each other.

“Grandma! We saw a huge sleigh light display on the way!” the boy exclaimed.

“And I lost a tooth last week!” his sister added, beaming up at her.

Mrs. Jolly gathered them all into hugs, her heart full. Tom carried in another box of presents and placed it under the tree. Coats were shed, everyone settled in—the adults in the comfortable chairs, the children cross-legged on the floor near the tree, eagerly reading names on the packages. Laughter and happy voices filled the warm room.

Outside, unseen by any of them, a lonely figure stood on the sidewalk. Matilda gazed wistfully through the large picture window at the glowing scene within—the hugs, the children’s excitement, the Christmas tree lights dancing across joyful faces. She stood there for a long moment, hands deep in her coat pockets, then lowered her head and walked slowly away.

At her own small table, beneath a tiny, sparsely decorated tree, Matilda sat down. She tried to add a bit of tinsel, but her hands soon stilled. She rested her head on her arms as quiet tears came. After a while she wiped her eyes, folded her hands in her lap, and simply sat in the dim light, head bowed.

Inside Mrs. Jolly’s house, the family laughed and talked, wrapped in love and light. Christmas Eve was perfect at last. Yet somewhere in the back of Mrs. Jolly’s mind, a small, quiet thought lingered—the kind that Christmas has a way of stirring up when we least expect it.

Part 2

Mrs. Jolly's Christmas Guest (continued)

In the warmth of the living room, with laughter still dancing in the air, Tom’s wife pulled out a carefully wrapped package and handed it to Mrs. Jolly with a tender smile. “You first, Mom,” Tom said. “Open ours before the kids tear into everything.”

Mrs. Jolly’s face glowed as she peeled back the paper to reveal a beautiful new Bible, its leather cover soft and rich. “Oh, my dears,” she whispered, tears of joy springing to her eyes. She hugged them both tightly. “This means more than you know.”

Just then, the aroma of roasting turkey reminded her of the kitchen. “I’d better check on dinner!” she exclaimed, bustling off with a spring in her step.

While the children knelt by the tree, guessing at the gifts, her daughter-in-law’s cell phone rang. She stepped aside to answer it. When Mrs. Jolly returned, wiping her hands on her apron and announcing that dinner would soon be ready, she found her son and his wife standing together with troubled faces. The children were suddenly quiet.

Tom took her gently aside. “Mom... that was Susan’s mother. She’s insisting we come spend Christmas Eve with her tonight instead of tomorrow. She got really upset when Susan tried to explain. I... I couldn’t say no.”

Mrs. Jolly’s smile faded. Concern turned to confusion, then to disbelief. “Tonight? But the turkey... the children... we’ve planned this for weeks!”

The next minutes unraveled like a torn ribbon. The children protested as coats were pulled on. Presents were gathered up, unopened. Mrs. Jolly, her heart pounding with hurt, confronted her daughter-in-law. Sharp words flew between them—words born of disappointment and defensiveness. Tom tried to intervene, but the damage was done. The grandchildren clung to their grandmother, crying, until their mother hurried them out the door.

Mrs. Jolly stood in the open doorway, apron clutched in her hands, watching the car pull away. The little faces pressed against the back window broke what remained of her heart. She closed the door slowly, as if sealing away every hope she had cherished for this night.

The house that had brimmed with joy now felt hollow. Mrs. Jolly sank into her chair, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. She looked around at the empty room, the untouched tree, the abandoned wrapping scraps.

“Why, Lord?” she whispered, then louder, her voice rising as she stood and began to pace. “Why must it be like this? I’ve waited all year. They chose her over me—again. After everything...” She walked back and forth, pouring out her resentment, her weariness, her sense of what was fair and what was not. The words spilled like tears: the other grandmother’s demands, her son’s weakness, her daughter-in-law’s stubbornness. The house felt colder with every complaint.

At last, exhausted, she sat down again.

In the quiet that followed, her eyes fell on the small package Matilda had left earlier. Curious, she picked it up and opened it. Inside was a delicate little lighthouse. She unfolded the card and read:

Dear Mary, thank you for being a friend to me when I had none. Since my husband passed away, I have felt like a ship without an anchor. Your kindness to me has been like a lighthouse in my storm. May this small gift remind you of what you have meant to me. Your friend, Matilda.

Mrs. Jolly lowered the card, her heart suddenly heavy. The words on the paper blurred as she remembered how she had rushed Matilda out into the cold, barely listening to her quiet pain. Now here she sat, alone in the very same emptiness she had refused to see in her neighbor.

She reached for the phone.

Across the way, the old tabletop phone rang. Matilda picked it up, surprised. As Mrs. Jolly’s voice came through—earnest, trembling with regret—Matilda pressed a hand to her mouth, tears gathering in her eyes.

“Matilda, I’m so sorry,” Mrs. Jolly said, pacing slowly across her living room. “I treated you poorly this evening. You reached out in kindness, and I pushed you away because I was selfish. Please forgive me. The house is quiet now... far too quiet. Would you come back and spend Christmas Eve with me? The turkey is hot, the tree is lit, and I would be truly honored if you’d share it with me.”

A moment of silence. Then joy broke across Matilda’s face like dawn. “I’d love to,” she whispered.

Mrs. Jolly hung up the phone and smiled—a real smile, soft and deep. Peace, that gentle visitor she thought had fled, returned and settled quietly in her heart.

She moved with new purpose. Spotting the lighthouse still on the table, she glanced around for something to give in return. Her eyes fell on the beautiful new Bible her son and daughter-in-law had given her. She already owned several. This one, she sensed, had a different destination.

Quickly she wrapped it in bright paper and ribbon. Just as she placed the last piece of tape, the doorbell chimed.

She opened the door and pulled Matilda inside with a warm, heartfelt embrace. “Come in, dear friend. Come in.”

Matilda slipped off her coat, her eyes shining. As they settled into the comfortable chairs near the glowing tree, Mrs. Jolly told her everything—how the sudden phone call had stolen the evening, how disappointment had made her sharp and unkind. “The Lord corrected me good,” she admitted with a humble chuckle. “I had no right to treat you that way.”

Matilda accepted the freshly wrapped gift with wondering hands. When the paper fell away and she saw the Bible, her fingers traced the soft leather in awe.

“This is for you,” Mrs. Jolly said gently. “Because the Lord loves you, Matilda. More than you know. And I believe He wants you to know Him better.”

They sat together as Matilda began leafing through the pages. Mrs. Jolly moved beside her, pointing to verses with the ease of a lifelong teacher who loved her subject.

Matilda’s old questions rose again, but this time they came softly, seeking. “Why do we make such a fuss over a baby born two thousand years ago?”

Mrs. Jolly smiled, her voice warm with wonder. “Because that Baby was God stepping into our story. He didn’t come as a king in a palace, but as a helpless child in a stable—so He could walk every road we walk, feel every hurt we feel. He was born of a miracle so He could live without sin, then carry all of ours to the cross.”

She turned the pages slowly, reading passage after passage. Matilda listened, her face intent, her heart opening like a window to the first light of morning. The words were not simply history to her anymore. They were hope. They were light breaking into a long, lonely night.

As Mrs. Jolly spoke of forgiveness, of a Savior who came for the lonely and the lost, something tender and holy settled over the room. Matilda’s eyes glistened with unshed tears—not of sorrow this time, but of awakening.

In that quiet living room, with the Christmas tree lights twinkling and the aroma of dinner warming the air, two hearts discovered what Christmas had always been about: not perfect plans or crowded schedules, but the simple, miraculous gift of God with us... and the beautiful way He invites us to be “with” one another.

Matilda rose from her chair and wrapped Mrs. Jolly in a hug so full of gratitude it seemed to squeeze the last shadows from the room. They held each other for a long moment, two elderly widows smiling through happy tears. In that embrace, loneliness melted like frost before the morning sun.

Just then, the doorbell chimed again.

Mrs. Jolly startled, then moved cautiously to the door and peeked out. What she saw made her heart leap. She flung the door wide.

There stood her son Tom and his family—and, to her great surprise, her daughter-in-law's mother beside them. The children rushed in first, followed by the adults, their arms full of the same presents they had carried away earlier.

“Mom, I'm so sorry,” Tom said, stepping inside. “When we got there, she wasn't feeling up to cooking. I suggested we all come back here where the turkey was already in the oven, and... well, here we are.”

Mrs. Jolly's face shone with joy. She welcomed each one with open arms, then gently drew Matilda forward from the edge of the room where she had quietly retreated.

“Everyone, this is my dear friend Matilda. She'll be celebrating Christmas with us tonight.”

Warm greetings filled the room. The grandchildren ran to Matilda first, wrapping their small arms around her. She laughed softly, her heart leaping as each family member welcomed her with genuine kindness.

In a quieter moment, Mrs. Jolly drew her daughter-in-law aside near the kitchen doorway. “I'm sorry for the harsh words I spoke earlier,” she said softly. “I let my disappointment rule my tongue.”

Her daughter-in-law embraced her. “I'm sorry too. When Mom called sounding so down, I just wanted to fix things for her. I didn't mean to hurt you.”

Forgiveness, once spoken, seemed to lighten the whole house.

Matilda had settled onto the couch with the new Bible in her lap. Tom noticed it and raised an eyebrow, recognizing the gift they had given his mother. He said nothing except, “That's a wonderful present.”

The children gathered close. “Will you read us the Christmas story?” the little girl asked. Matilda's face glowed as she opened the pages. The youngest grandchild climbed into her lap without hesitation. With a voice full of fresh wonder, Matilda began to read:

“And it came to pass in those days...”

The children listened, wide-eyed. Tom caught his wife's eye as she returned from the kitchen and pressed a finger to his lips, pointing to the tender scene. The parents stood arm in arm, smiling at the sight of Matilda reading the ancient words to their little ones—her face radiant with a joy she had never known before.

Just as she finished the last words of the story, Mrs. Jolly stepped in from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. "Dinner is ready, everyone!"

As the happy procession moved toward the dining room—children chattering, adults laughing, Matilda walking with a new lightness in her step—Mrs. Jolly lingered behind for a moment. She looked around the room that had held such sorrow only a short while ago. Now it brimmed with life and love.

She lifted her eyes toward heaven, clasped her hands, and whispered a simple, grateful prayer. The unease and self-pity had vanished, replaced by the warm glow of Christ's own love shared freely with others.

For in the end, Mrs. Jolly had learned what the angels sang about on that first Christmas night: the greatest joy comes not in receiving the perfect celebration we planned, but in opening our hearts and homes to those who need the Savior's light. Sometimes the loneliest soul on our doorstep is the very gift God sent to remind us why the Baby was born.

And so, with a heart full of grace and a table full of blessing, Mrs. Jolly followed her guests into the dining room, where laughter and the aroma of roasted turkey welcomed them all.

Christmas had come, after all—just as it always does when love makes room.

THE END