

THE STORY OF ZEPHYR

A Christmas Story

**BY
JEANIE OLIVER SMITH**

Table of Contents

THE STORY OF ZEPHYR

CHAPTER I EDWY'S WISH

CHAPTER II THE LITTLE TRAPPER

CHAPTER III A WELCOME GUEST

CHAPTER IV ZEPHYR "SECOND"

CHAPTER V THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

CHAPTER VI DEPARTURE OF THE FIRST GROUP OF CAMPERS

CHAPTER VII ONE OF ZEPHYR'S SUMMER HOMES

CHAPTER VIII A SURPRISE

TO
GEORGIA JOHNSON HENRY

THE STORY OF ZEPHYR
A Christmas Story

CHAPTER I

EDWY'S WISH

"FATHER, may I have an English setter for my Christmas present?"

Edwy spoke in a subdued tone, for the president of a certain Association, a country club, of which his father was a member, had come to say good-bye. One branch of the party of campers on the lake was about to break up; city schools were calling them from forest and from field.

The stranger had taken a seat on the broad veranda, his dog at his heels, his carriage and horses waiting.

Bruno knew his little friend Edwy. The boy stood stroking the dog's ears and speaking gentle words to him. The dog seemed to listen but although he was all attention and laid his head down on crossed paws, one eye was alert for the movements of his master.

A dog, an English setter like Bruno, was one thing which Edwy had sought with constant iteration since he was old enough to talk; especially since he had seen the devotion of Bruno for his master and even his master's horses. He had also gained the dog's confidence towards himself.

Edwy's mother felt that she must not let him keep on hoping for the impossible. They could not take a dog to a city home while they were building the camp on the lake. It was equally

out of the question either, to carry him back and forth on the cars, or to leave him at home with servants while all the family were away.

As he stood stroking the dog's ears and speaking his own little tender words to him, the watchful mother explained, aside, the reason of the refusal.

"You know, Edwy, a dog gets so terribly homesick if left in the care of servants. Just see how Bruno is waiting to leap to his master's side, and fly down the road the moment the horse's hoofs ring on the highway.... When you are older...."

How Edwy hated the words, "when you are older!" It always meant that you couldn't have something when you wanted it. But as he was a well-bred child, he always kept quiet in company. He had sometimes confided to Willard, his brother, but that didn't help much.

"Could I have a kitten then? I do want some kind of a thing that isn't either dumb or dead." A certain chum of Edwy's—not the usual kind of a chum—but one in his own and Willard's estimation well worthy of the name, had noticed the fact that the child had so bravely banished the frown of disappointment. She had also noted the fact that no ban had been placed against a kitten, and a plan was forming in her mind, but she did not divulge it.

CHAPTER II

THE LITTLE TRAPPER

EDWY had been called "The Little Trapper." He had read every book he could find about animals. After reading some of them, he would be the "warrior bold"; would long to be old enough to shoot and slay and pursue big game through the forest spaces, but bless his heart, he hadn't the least idea that there was any tragedy in it. He had made box-traps with his own hands, but in such a way, however, that it would hardly frighten the little creatures to be caught, for he would only keep the little prisoners an hour, or a minute perhaps, feed them, and let them go free.

One day he had found in his trap a pretty brown-eyed musk-rat, and the creature found himself liberated beside his own stream, not a bit the worse for its experience. And one day he found a strange slate-colored dormouse, but it had managed to get out of its cage by its own ingenuity or some one's help.

Another day he caught several little squirrels, first getting one, then another, and another, and letting them pass by a bridge of his own or his father's contriving, from one box to another, but they were all to be set free in a short time and seemed to think it was mere play. At first they seemed to try to tease each other, their comrades, for the moment. He had discovered that in this first stage they would not eat, but after a while he had rushed into the house to tell Willard his new discovery.

“Why, Willard, they’ve all got acquainted with each other, and they know me. They seem to know that I don’t mean to hurt them, and now they ‘grab’ for everything I offer them to eat.”

It soon became evident that the squirrel families would have to be more severely dealt with, for more than once they had disturbed the little birds on their nests, and in some cases had been known to destroy their eggs; so a plan was formed to transport one or two of the squirrel families to another portion of the woods, and thus leave the robins and the warblers in undisputed possession near the camp.

At length came the plans for the opening of the doors of the temporary trap, to introduce the squirrels to their new forest home.

Where the lake laps the shore, several rowboats were drawn up in line and it was but the work of a moment to embark, for all the interested members of the little group could enter readily into the child’s feelings. The morning was one of the gems of June, with crystal sky and lake. As the boats sped out towards the further shore the wise little creatures in the box crowded further back, massed themselves in a bunch, their feet towards the opening of the box, their pointed noses quivering with excitement. Their little sharp bead-like eyes alert, but less full of fear than at first, for already they had grown familiar with a petting word from the little “trapper” and friend, and were fast growing trustful of their human kind.

Now the problem was to get them to cross the small channel of deep water which lay between them and the shore. A rustic bridge was made by means of a wide board, and then the doors

were opened! Such a patter of little twinkling feet as they ran, one after another, "low geared" for the land, while the party sailed back or remained on the lake to enjoy the delights of rod and line, the feast of the flowers on the banks and the songs of numberless birds, all part of the glorious summer time.

CHAPTER III

A WELCOME GUEST

SOME weeks previous to this, while the campers still thought they had the whole summer before them, a little white kitten with gold spots, had come, seemingly from nowhere, and had sought admission—not to Edwy's camp—but to his Uncle's, across the lake.

His Uncle's wife was the dearest, the most teasing aunt in the world. She was known sometimes as "Aida," from a pet name one of them had given her. They had never called her Aunt, but always some nice pet name and always pretended they didn't care a flip for her, but she knew better, for wasn't she their own mother's sister, who had also a pet name of her own? And were they not both daughters of this great chum of theirs, who, as their father had told them was entirely their own contemporary and equal, but at the same time they mustn't tease her or treat her as if they were playing football; and mustn't touch her pretty white dress with their "candy" fingers.

Edwy was glad that the kitten had come to visit them. He was afraid that the winter would be hard on the poor thing... Everybody said it could take care of itself, but why couldn't it take care of itself now? It came every morning, to ask them for food and would give its high-toned purr of satisfaction when they had fed it.

Much as Edwy liked it, he was glad that it had not come to his father's camp, for they had some little rabbits.

They had brought them, when old enough, from their own home, and had let them run wild through the woods and underbrush, near the woods and the lake.

"But would you believe it, Willard?" he said to his brother, "they come back to our camp, just as soon as they hear my voice shouting to them, half a mile away, and then they begin to show up out of the underbrush."

It was always jolly at his Aunt's camp, for in his own camp, he feared the rabbits and the kitten might not agree, and he and Willard were quite as much at home in the one place as the other.

The only time when the kitten had visited their camp on the hill was once, when they had all been away a few days, and when both camps were empty for that length of time.

On coming back, the very first thing they saw, in front of Edwy's father's camp, was the little white kitten sitting on the door-step, crying a glad welcome to them, arching its back, and reaching up for them to pet it. Very soon Edwy took the megaphone from its corner and called over the lake....

"Hello!"

The sound of Aida's voice came floating back.

"Yes: I can hear you."

“We all thought our little Zephyr was lost, but she is here, all safe and sound; and she’s had a bowl of milk. Willard and I are going to row the boat over the lake, and bring her back to your house, Aida, for that is her real home.”

On reaching the other shore, Aida and Mo-ma were glad to welcome the boys with their pet, for they had all feared she was lost. She had found her way to the other house, along a wood road, they thought, all the way. If she had gone along the borders of the lake, it would have been much nearer, but it was swampy that way, so she must have taken the high road and had made friends with the tame rabbits, not hurting any of them.

The boys were well pleased with the result of their afternoon’s visit, for Zephyr seemed so glad to get home, that she went through all her little antics for them, hiding under the wood pile, then leaping out to surprise them and glancing up in their faces almost as if she were laughing, trying races with them along the wooded shore. After the boys had partaken of the nice little lunch that Aida had planned for them, some cake and berries, crimson raspberries that had grown in the field by the road-side, it was time to take the boat for their homeward trip.

Zephyr followed them to the bank and looked after them as long as there was light enough to see the boat. Aida also, watching them off, and their dear mother outlined against the further shore, waiting their arrival.

CHAPTER IV

ZEPHYR "SECOND"

It was Edwy himself who had named the cat Zephyr second. For one summer they had a cat visitor that he named Zephyr, but she had gone back to her home among the mountains and they had never seen her again. But for this little kitten that had come to them, so white, so pretty and engaging, a real snowflake in color, so tiny and playful; Zephyr seemed such an appropriate name. He could not call it Zephyr alone, for that would have seemed like forgetting the former one, who was not so beautiful as this one, and had never leaped higher than one's head like this one, but Zephyr second, or Zephyr II, would be quite the thing, and keep the former one in memory.

He was glad that this one had come to his Aunt Aida's, for they would be a month longer in camp, and then Zephyr's winter would not seem so long.

He seemed more and more appreciative of all the graceful pranks of his pet when she ran like a wild happy thing, leaping up as high as the fence posts after butterflies in the sunshine, running up to the very tops of the trees, and back again, but never catching the birds, oh no; she was too happy to lie in wait for them, and the best trick of all was, when she would sit on the bank and watch for a boat coming from the other camp, every time he and Willard were out of her sight. She would listen for the lapping of the oars, then leap to the bank, give a

glad little cry, arch her back, and give her sweet, high-toned purr when they came near.

One evening before it was quite dark, when supper was just ready at their father's camp on the hill, Aida and Mo-ma had come over to stay all night. They were to have their even-song, with the organ, violin, and guitar, and the sweet human sympathetic voices of all in unison. The songs which Edwy was sure "could be heard by the birds in their nests high up in the tall trees, that leaned over the camp roof."

They had just heard Willard and his father, fastening their boat at the foot of the hill, and now they, "the truants," were running quickly up the stone steps from the landing, when Willard, the first comer, opened the door and thrust some object inside.

It was none other than Zephyr!

"While we were passing your dock, we saw Zephyr waiting all alone on the bank. We called to her, and she came running down and we took her right into the boat with us, and here she is!"

"You precious darling," said Edwy, stroking her.

As supper was now ready, he took her in his lap, and, contrary to all rules, he fed her, as the poet Maeterlinck used to do with his pet cat, talking to her in his happy voice in his own place at the table.

The evening had grown cool enough to have a fire of apple-tree wood, blazing before the broad hearth, so before they began their even-song, Willard had laid the moss-covered logs

together and lighted them, removing first the dainty fender, which his own hands had made, with artistic deftness; having woven in the name of their camp among the interstices of the woven wire. Now, where the welcome fire-glow shone through it on the hearth-rug. Zephyr had taken her position, quite at home and happy; purring her "grey thrums," louder than ever, in her contentment.

CHAPTER V

THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

It seemed now as if this second camp, where Zephyr lived, had new attractions for Edwy. He would spend the days happily with his friends.

Here was that teasing aunt Aida, and his friend, "Mo-ma"; his own little conceit to avoid the longer name, but then he had as many pet names for her, as there were months in the year. She never held up other boys to them as examples, for she always seemed to think that he and Willard were the "best ever."

But it was drawing near the time that one branch of the family of campers would have to say good-bye to summer fields and woods, and go back to the city and school. Edwy felt a little blue about leaving his pets and had a quiet talk with this special friend of his, after the rest had gone out on the lake to have a last chance at the trout fishing, before leaving the lake.

He was in the reminiscent mood that precedes sleep, and was telling his friend how much he wished they would always stay in the country.

"But, after all, you would miss the bright, happy Christmas, in the city home, you know."

"Oh yes, to be sure, and we'll have the lovely snowflakes coming down from the sky, and a lot of good times."

She had asked him then, when they were talking about Christmas, and about all the delights of that time, if he knew the real meaning of Christmas.

“Why yes,” he had answered. “It is to keep in mind a very great event in the world, the greatest that ever happened. But then, you know, it wouldn’t be Christmas to us boys, if we didn’t get some gifts of our very own, for we can’t always be thinking ‘big thoughts.’”

“So many things,” he continued, “were impossible until he was older. He had wanted a dog, but he couldn’t have that. He had asked for a cat, but, of course, he couldn’t have that. He could only have kids’ things.

“If he was only a shepherd he could have some lambs. He had once had a tame weasel and it was the dearest thing, but you couldn’t pet a weasel, although you could get to love it, and feel as if the world had come to an end when it died.

“But there was always one Christmas that he remembered. He had got a lot of things that day, but when night came he was so tired, that he had a fight with his brother. Oh, not a real fight, you know; only the kind that brothers always have. People may think you awful, and send you off to bed, but half the time you don’t know what’s the matter. Why, that was only last Christmas? Do you remember that night, Mo-ma?”

“Perfectly.”

“We were at home in the city,” he continued. “You had come up to my room and sat by me. I was all covered up with the quilt, so you wouldn’t see my red eyes. All at once we heard some

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

