

Dorothy Gale woke up and felt something lying on her chest. She peeked out over the quilt and saw her white kitten Eureka curled up on her. She laughed to herself and sat up, making the cat move to elsewhere on the bed, not without some protest. Dorothy petted the kitten and soon it was purring and nodding off to sleep again.

Sleeping just beside the bed was Toto, Dorothy's little black dog. She carefully got out of bed and as she did, Toto opened his eyes and looked up at her, merrily wagging his tail.

"Merry Christmas, Toto," Dorothy whispered.

She began to change out of her nightdress. It was Christmas morning, but as Uncle Henry would say, "Our animals don't have holidays."

Dorothy couldn't imagine that the animals didn't celebrate Christmas in their own way, but she knew what he meant: she would still need to feed the chickens before breakfast.

After dressing, Dorothy put on her coat and walked downstairs, Toto following behind her.

"Good morning, Aunt Em!" the little girl said to her aunt as she walked through the kitchen. "Merry Christmas!"

The kitchen smelled of spicy gingerbread in the oven as Aunt Em prepared pancakes on their stove. She smiled warmly at her niece as Dorothy went out into the snow.

Walking into the barn, the girl took a handful of feed from a covered barrel and scattered it on the ground in the hens' coop. During the cold weather, the hens had to be kept inside.

Dorothy sighed as she watched the hens peck away at their kernels. Just a couple years ago, Uncle Henry had several hens, a mule, two cows, a couple pigs and a rooster. Now, there were only six hens and one cow. Dorothy knew something was going on that Uncle Henry wasn't telling her about, but she decided that if she needed to know, he'd tell her. But she did wonder how Uncle Henry would drive the plow come springtime now that he didn't have the mule.

"Merry Christmas, Dorothy," said Uncle Henry. Dorothy looked up and saw that he had just finished milking the cow.

"Merry Christmas," she replied, smiling. "Do you need help carrying the milk?"

Uncle Henry smiled. "No, I have it."

The two walked inside where Aunt Em had breakfast ready.

As it was winter, there was very little to do. During the rest of the year, Dorothy would play outside with Toto and Eureka when she wasn't helping with the chores. Now that it was cold outside, her dog and cat preferred to stay indoors.

"Do you think the snow's deep enough to make a snowman?" Dorothy asked as she helped Aunt Em with the dishes as Uncle Henry walked to the front room.

"I expect so," Aunt Em replied. "Maybe you can make one later."

"Maybe I could make a snow princess," Dorothy sighed. "Like Ozma, you know."

Aunt Em nodded.

"Just be careful not to get too cold," she added.

Dorothy's tales of her adventures in the Land of Oz had grown in the past year, when Henry had taken ill and taken a trip to Australia to recover his health. Dorothy had accompanied him as hiring a nurse would be too expensive, and it would do her good to see more of the world. In fact, they had hoped that she'd be fascinated with her travels and her talk about Oz would be replaced with stories about Australia, California, or even the ocean. But while Dorothy had been fascinated by her trip, she had disappeared twice—and been feared dead—only to return with more stories about fantastic adventures that brought her to the Land of Oz again.

There was something very strange about Dorothy's tales: they were very consistent. She never seemed to be consciously lying, and she related her stories with a sense of authority. She didn't seem to be making up the story or filling in the details on the spot.

Still, how could these stories be true? Living scarecrows and men made of metal, talking animals, fairy princesses, witches, nomes, sorceresses, emerald cities. None of it made any sense. Aunt Em had

decided that Dorothy had a very vivid imagination and could tell a good story when she made up her mind to, or the stories were actually real.

“Well, are you two ladies going to stay in the kitchen?” asked Uncle Henry, walking back to the kitchen with a pleasant smile. “It is Christmas, after all.”

Dorothy and Aunt Em walked into the parlor and found a number of parcels wrapped in brown paper, tied with cheap little strings.

“Christmas belongs to the children,” Uncle Henry said. “So I think it’s best if Dorothy opens a gift first.”

He handed a small package to her. Dorothy smiled and opened it, revealing a new pair of mittens Aunt Em had knitted while Dorothy was away.

“Thank you, Aunt Em!” she said and hugged her aunt. “I’ll make a beautiful snow princess while I’m wearing these! Oh, Uncle Henry, give her a present now!”

“Ah, very well.”

Aunt Em found a lovely green delaine dress, covered with a pattern of small prints of strawberries.

“We bought it for you in Australia,” Dorothy commented.

“Oh my, you shouldn’t have!” Aunt Em protested, although she was clearly delighted.

“Well, I bought Dorothy a new dress and hat and got her hair put in a bob,” Uncle Henry explained. “It only seemed fair that I get something nice for my beautiful wife.”

Aunt Em shook her head with a smile and kissed her husband.

“It must have cost so much!”

“We lost a lot of things in the old house that the cyclone took away,” Dorothy explained. “It was high time you had something nice for yourself again, Aunt Em.”

The little family continued to happily open their presents. To be sure, none of them were very fancy or extravagant, and they didn’t have very many, but that didn’t matter as much as the love and thought that went into each one.

“Now for the big one,” Uncle Henry announced after the last little parcel had been opened. He walked to the crawlspace and pulled out a large box. “This had arrived for us at the post office when I was in town day before last. It’s from Bill Hugson and his nephew, Zeb.”

He opened it and they found it to contain several oranges, and a selection of nuts and raisins.

“We’d feast like royalty on these!” Aunt Em exclaimed. “Dear me, we’ll have to have the oranges very soon. The rest will keep and I think I can use the nuts and raisins in some recipes. We’ll have to send a letter thanking them for this!”

Dorothy picked up an orange. She hadn’t had one since she’d left California. Carefully, she pulled open the peel and smelled the fresh fruit underneath.

“You can have that all to yourself,” Uncle Henry assured her.

Pulling the peel off, Dorothy took out a slice and slowly ate it, savoring each juicy bit.

“And now that I think about it,” Uncle Henry continued. He brought a wax paper bag out from the crawlspace and handed it to Dorothy, who found it to be a long stick of peppermint candy.

“I had to treat my little girl,” he said with a smile.

Dorothy stared at the candy. It was a rare treat because it was made with white sugar, which certainly cost more than the brown sugar. She had thought the only treat she’d have this Christmas would be Aunt Em’s gingerbread that was now cooling in the kitchen. Now there was an orange and a nice piece of candy as well.

“Oh my,” she sighed. “I couldn’t have asked for anything better, even if I was in the Land of Oz.”

Uncle Henry smiled.

“I’ll make it last as long as I can!” Dorothy promised as she wrapped the candy up again.

“What’s this?” Aunt Em asked as she lifted an envelope from the mantel over the fireplace. It had Dorothy’s name on it and was sealed with green wax.

“Perhaps Santa Claus left it for me,” Dorothy suggested.

Aunt Em gave it to Dorothy and the little girl opened it. Inside was a letter, written on a fine piece of paper. Dorothy began to read it to herself. She smiled, laughed softly, then took it upstairs and then came back down.

“Well, who was it from?” Uncle Henry asked.

“My friends in Oz,” Dorothy replied with a smile. “Santa Claus dropped it off for them, just as I thought.”

“What did they say?” Aunt Em inquired.

“They wished us a merry Christmas, told me about how they wish I was visiting, and to remember the sign I can make for Ozma to bring me to Oz.”

Aunt Em sighed.

“I think I’ll go make a snow princess now,” Dorothy continued. She began pulling on her boots, coat and mittens.

“You know what, Dorothy?” Uncle Henry said as he watched her wrap a scarf around her neck. “I think I’ll join you.”

Aunt Em smiled and shook her head.

“Well, if the two of you are going to go outside and play in the snow, I might as well,” she said with a laugh. “And after we’re done, we’ll warm up with some coffee and gingerbread.”

Toto barked after the three as they went outside. Eureka crawled out from underneath the stove and looked around the corner at the door before walking back to the warmth of the kitchen and curling back up.

“We’ll be fine, Toto,” Dorothy chuckled as she patted his head before she led the way outside into a snowy Kansas Christmas.