

Annie's treasure

A dramatic poem in three parts by Robin Hill and Alec Shuttleworth

The scene: A grandparent sits in a chair with, nearby, a large story book (concealing the actor's script). S/he is surrounded by grandchildren.

Adult: Yes, yes, yes! We'll have just one more story. Which one will read together?

Children: "Annie's Treasure!"

Adult: "Annie's Treasure"? Well, alright then. [*Grandparent picks up book*] Are you sitting comfortably?

Children: Yes!

Adult: Then I'll begin.

[Grandparent reads]

Part One: Friday

'Twas the end of the summer and all through the village
the locals got ready to raid and to pillage.
The charity auction was coming their way,
with all sorts of goodies, the very next day.

An army of helpers had banded together,
leafleting houses in terrible weather.
They'd organised vans and they'd commandeered pickups
to make sure their plans would progress without hiccups.

Then, thanks to much heaving and to-ing and fro-ing,
the unwanted items soon started a-flowing,
from wardrobes and sideboards to massive Welsh dressers,
from concrete coal bunkers to old air compressors.

From crumhorns and hairnets to snorkels and flippers,
from brollies and cake stands to big plastic kippers,
from bedsteads to footballs, from sofas to boxes,
from ancient portmanteaux to shoeses and socksies.

The neighbourhood gave without rhyme, without reason,
but each cast off item arrived in due season,
until by that Friday the hall was jam-packed, full
of ... “treasures” (a word that *might* prove to be tactful).

That evening, the sorting was done in a flurry,
while auctioneers looked at their watches with worry.
In eighteen short hours all the bids would be flying
with punters intent on some serious buying.

Who’d snap up a bargain? Who’d whoop with delight?
Who’d outbid their brother? Who’d start a big fight?
Who’d find an old master? Who’d holler with glee
at the charity auction? Well ... just wait and see!

[Grandparent snaps the book shut]

Children: More! More!

Adult: Oh no! It’s getting far too late!

Children: More!

Adult: Oh well. Just this once.

[Grandparent re-opens the book, and continues]

Part Two: Saturday

When Saturday came, the doors were thrown wide
to bidders and dealers, who had to decide
what was nine-carat gold, what was cheap painted tin,
and what was fit only to chuck in the bin.

The people came early to take in a viewing,
nodding as though they knew what they were doing.
And there in the fracas was six-year-old Annie,
holding the hands of her Grandpa and Granny.

This way and that, Annie looked for some treasure
of infinite value beyond human measure.
“What’s that?” she cried, spotting a painted toy stable
attached to a dusty old brown paper label.

“*Nativity set*”, read her Grandpa aloud,
as he rescued the shed from the circling crowd.
“A Nativity set?” said the child, “Glory be!
A Nativity set??? That’s the thing just for me!”

And so little Annie (and no, I’m *not* kidding)
engaged in some serious auction day bidding.
One pound, one pound fifty, two pounds and two fifty,
her bids came on cue and her bidding was nifty.

The other contenders soon gave up the chase
and slunk themselves off in disgust and disgrace.
The winner was Annie! The hall raised a cheer (*HUZZAH!*)
... while Granny discreetly shed one tiny tear.

So, with the job done and her pennies donated
young Annie ran home feeling more than elated.
But what of the stable? Oh well, dearie me,
you’ll just have to wait ... and then maybe you’ll see!

[Grandparent snaps the book shut]

Children: More! More!

Adult: What? More? Surely not!

Children: More!

Adult: Oh well. Seeing as it’s you.

[Grandparent re-opens the book, and continues]

Part Three: December

The weeks rolled on by and in time little Annie
was round at the house of her Grandpa and Granny.
With lots of excitement they placed on their table
the brown paper parcel containing ... the stable!

Inside were more packets, each one with a figure
of colourful china – some small, others bigger.
“Oh look!” shouted Annie, “It’s Joseph and Mary!
And here come the animals, woolly and hairy!”

Then Grandpa said: “Fancy! Courageous old shepherds,
protecting their flocks against lions and leopards.”
“And see,” cried out Granny, “the wise men so bold
with their frankincense, myrrh and a great crock of gold.”

“They’re *perfect*,” said Annie, in wide-eyed delight.
“Oh, grandparents look: they’re so fine and so bright!”
She skipped round the table in joy, gladly clapping,
'til Granny suggested she do more unwrapping.

[Slow delivery from now on]

And *that’s* when she found him ... the heavenly child.
She gasped at his hands – they were smashed and defiled.
“Oh no!” said our Ann. “That’s not how he should be.
This Jesus is broken. *Please* fix him for me.”

“My darling,” said Grandpa, “you’re right, it’s quite true.
But no, I won’t mend him. Just let me tell you
that Jesus *was* broken, and in his own day
he grew up to see for himself the cruel way

in which people turn nasty when they should be kind,
they limit their vision and choose to be blind
to the needs of the poor and the sad and rejected,
and that’s not a choice that is right, or expected.

This Jesus reached out to the poor, the despised,
the lepers, the tax men, the ones never prized
or cared for or valued, for they were cast out
by the great and the good (who felt godly, no doubt).

So Jesus soon found himself nailed to a tree,
deserted and broken. His death helps us see
that when we stand up for what’s just and what’s right
the rich and the powerful start picking a fight.

This Jesus, though shattered, was never defeated,
and on Easter Day he came back, and he greeted
those friends who had left him alone on the Cross,
and he showed them his death spoke of gain, *not* of loss.

Amid all the gloom of life's troubles, God's Light
still shines in our darkness, still glows in our night.
This Jesus, once lifeless, comes back to reveal
that God's love in our world is still working to heal.

So Annie, I won't fix your Jesus, because ...
it's *his* broken hands that he used to fix *us*.
Now each time we look, and we see them again,
we'll know God is Love, and God loves *us*.
[Grandparent closes book] AMEN!"

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Authors' note: A Nativity set with a broken Jesus was indeed handed in to Longniddry Christian Aid's auction in August 2011. It was spotted by theology student Katie Hill, who remarked on the significance of the damaged figure to Robin, her Dad. He promptly forgot their conversation(!) though something must have stuck somewhere in his mind because the first draft of this poem emerged two months later.

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If you use it, have fun, and let us know how it goes!

With best wishes, especially for Christmas when it comes,

Robin and Alec (and Katie too)

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