

# WHEN YOU'RE SEVEN



twelve, all the bells began to peal, and the carillons interwove their music into the random but Bach-like pattern of sound. They continued for fifteen full minutes.

The way Christmas is, and the way it will always be, is the way it was when I was seven.

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This is by way of a postscript. Christmas is a sad time, perhaps because the realities of Christmas present cannot relate to the joys of the ghost of Christmas past. Maybe that's because I won't be back in Warstein this Christmas, although I don't think the same magic awaits my return.

Most of my Christmases have been spent in cities. Halifax, London, Ottawa. Somehow the parties, the snowy streets (yes, and the slush), the streetlights that the falling snow swirls around without ever landing, the rows of chimneys giving off what any other time would be air pollution, and the Bing Crosby and Perry Como 78 RPMs, they all mean Christmas in the city and they're all beautiful and I love them but I'm still sad. Country Christmases are great, too. The house in the picture is Highland Acres, and it is about 120 years old, but aging well. Ten-foot-deep drifts, pouring hot water over the pump at daybreak to draw tooth-brushing water, and the trip to the general store to buy spices for the gingerbread men are straight out of Currier and Ives. But Christmas still exerts its malaise. Its approach used to fill me with a unique sort of dread, the feeling that I wouldn't measure up to its requirements.

For Christmas requires love, and, for an adult, love given and received is not a natural consequence of his surroundings. When you're in love, you are consciously making yourself easy to hurt, even after you've spent most of your life building a shell. It is the feeling of leaving that shell behind that is the joy regained of Christmas present. This will be my finest Christmas. I hope you have found love, too.

*The night before I did not rest well, I was really violently in love with Louisa. I thought she did not care for me. I thought that if I did not gain her affections, I would appear despicable to myself. This day I was in better frame, being Christmas Day, which always inspired me with the most agreeable feelings. I went to St. Paul's Church and in that magnificent temple fervently adored the God of goodness and mercy, and heard a sermon by the Bishop of Oxford on the publishing of glad tidings of great joy.*

James Boswell  
Christmas Day, 1762.

- tom rossiter  
the gazette



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Then the massive door to our right opened quickly  
d, through the tears, it seemed like the star of Beth-  
em. Darleen Cochran's mother and father were  
ere. So were the Corboulds. The light came from the  
e Tannenbaum, aglitter with real candles, the way  
y still do it in Europe. Underneath were boxes.

ndreds. And we ate kuchen, and Frau Weimer made  
oe that developed skin on top if you didn't drink  
st enough, and there were German potatoes which  
fused to eat because German potatoes are yellow  
de and there was leibfraumilch, I suppose, because  
asn't old enough for wine. And then it was about  
ight, and we climbed the carved stairs, and, just  
re we climbed into our beds with massive puffy  
ows and thick patchwork quilts, we went to the  
ed windows, which opened not up, but out and to  
sides from the thick casements, and we looked  
The stars were close enough to touch. The fields  
round were white. There were many hills, all top-  
it seemed, each by a tiny chapel with a rooster or  
oss on top of the steeple. Then, on the stroke of