

HENRIETTA THE CHRISTMAS MOUSE – CHAPTER ONE



A Letter to Santa

A London Morning in 1910

It was a perfectly lovely winter day in London in the year 1910. If you were flying overhead the view of London would show a city of great excitement. Looking closer in you would see a city of snow, cobblestone streets, and horse drawn carriages. There were gaslights and plenty of people shopping for Christmas gifts. There were also many animals running around everywhere. The animals were doing a whole lot of – well, animal things.

As you look closer you might even see a little girl named Teresa who is about 6 years old in her small room. She is sitting on a small wooden box she uses as a chair and is dressed in her nightclothes. She is facing a larger wooden box her parents made into a small table. The little girl has blond hair with lots of curls.

Teresa's home is very small. It sits at the end of a short dark street. Her family is very poor and they cannot afford to buy any Christmas presents. In fact, they are so poor that her parents did not know if they could make enough money to pay the next month's rent.

The area of London that they live in is also very crowded. It is very noisy, with people and pushcarts going all about most times of the day and night. It can also get very foggy in this part of London. The fog and black smoke from the coal fires often fills the air. Most of the time Teresa would be found playing in the small front yard of her home or playing in her room. Today however, she has a very special job to do.

As we look in on her we can see that she is writing a letter to Santa.

Dear Santa,

How are you doing? I hope it is not too cold for you and Mrs. Claus at the North Pole. I hope there is not too much snow. I have been a very good girl. I wanted to ask you for a gift for my mommy and daddy and my little mouse Henrietta. Henrietta has been very good too. I don't know what they want. I'm sure you will find something nice. If you can could you also send me a new pair of shoes. I need them so that I can go to school. I hope all of the reindeer are happy and well. Remember not to eat too many cookies on Christmas Eve. Thank you Santa.

Your good friend Teresa

After Teresa finished her letter to Santa she put the letter in an envelope and addressed it to "Santa Claus, North Pole." Just as she finished, Henrietta, her little gray American house mouse jumped on the box. She squealed a friendly mouse hello to Teresa. Teresa was happy to see her little mouse who usually wears her big floppy hat. She said, "Hello Henrietta. This is a very important letter. This is a letter to Santa. I have to mail it today so Christmas will come. If you don't send a letter to Santa he will not know where to visit. It's very important to send just the proper letter to Santa. That way he knows you have been good. That is so he can look in his 'Naughty and Nice' book and find your name."

Henrietta nodded her head and squealed a little.

Teresa then gave the letter to Henrietta. Teresa said, "Here Henrietta. Put a mouse mark on the letter so that Santa knows it comes from you as well. Santa always likes to get letters from animals."

Henrietta thought it was a nice idea. She put her hand in the ink well and put a very nice little mouse mark on the back of the envelope.

Teresa said, "There we are. All done. Now we can send it to Santa."

Teresa and Henrietta loved being together. They have all kinds of adventures in her little room. Most nights when they were finished playing, just before bedtime, Teresa would often open her picture book and look at the story with Henrietta. But for now it was time to keep a lookout for the mailman.

A letter for the Mailman

Looking out of the window Teresa could see that it had begun to snow ever so lightly. It was just a little bit here and a little bit there. It put a light dust of snow over everything. Teresa reached down and picked up Henrietta and placed her on the windowsill so she could see. "Look Henrietta, it's starting to snow. You know, Santa likes the snow. He lives in the North Pole and it snows a lot at the North Pole."

Henrietta looked at Teresa and squealed a friendly little mouse squeal. She looked back out of the window at an early morning London Street. Teresa did not understand what Henrietta said because she does not speak mouse. But somehow they still manage to understand each other. It was just then that the mailman came around the corner and walked towards Teresa's little house.

Teresa said to Henrietta, "Look Henrietta, it's the mailman. I'd better put my coat on so I can give him my letter for Santa." Henrietta looked at Teresa, smiled and nodded her little head as Teresa grabbed her coat and put on her old slippers. Looking back, Teresa said, "Don't go away. I'll be right back."

Henrietta mouse sat back to watch the mailman as he walked to the front door.

With a great 'whoosh' the front door opened wide, which surprised the mailman. The surprised mailman said, "Well now, what is all this then?"

Teresa looked up to the mailman and said, "Hello Mr. Mailman. I'm sorry I frightened you. I did not want to miss you."

The mailman was very friendly. He understood how exciting it can be to mail a letter. "Well there young lady," he said with a big smile, "I would say that you certainly arrived in time. Now, what can I do for you on this frosty London morning?"

"Mr. Mailman," said Teresa, "I have a very important letter for Santa. I need to get it to him before Christmas."

"I see," said the mailman. "Well, you better let me have it then. We will see to it that it is on its way."

Teresa said, "Thank you, Mr. Mailman. Good-by."

"Good-by now." Said the mailman. "You better get inside. I think the snow is going to blow hard soon."

"I will," said Teresa.

Teresa then waved good-by to the mailman. However, because Teresa went inside and closed the door she was not able to see what happened next. She was off to the back kitchen to get ready to go out. She would not be able to see Henrietta when her little mouse went down the stairs in a short while. Teresa and her parents would soon leave their little home. They were taking Teresa to her new school so she could meet her new teacher. They would go out the back door and did not see the mailman when he left. However, her little mouse Henrietta would see everything.

The Lost Letter!

As the snow continued to fall Henrietta climbed out of her little shoebox home. She had gone there after Teresa left the room. She pressed her little nose up to the glass and once again looked out of the window. The mailman was checking his bag and was just leaving the front yard. He was closing the gate. Just then a group of dogs rushed by. They were chased by a group of small boys who almost ran into the mailman.

"Oh my!" Said the mailman. "What is all this excitement about?" Excitement it was as one of the dogs hit the mailbag. All of the letters in the bag went up into the air and fell everywhere. The mailman spun around in a great turn. He looked like a big blue top spinning around. The mailman was soon very busy picking up all of the letters he could find. However, he did not find all of them, even though he looked very hard for the letters. One of the letters he could not find was Teresa's letter to Santa!

"Oh no!" said Henrietta looking from the windowsill. "Teresa's letter. The mailman did not see where it went." Seeing where the letter had landed, Henrietta grabbed her hat and put on her little shoes and scarf. She rushed down the stairs to the front and out of the house through a doggie door. She quickly found Teresa's letter, but it was too late. The mailman was nowhere in sight.

"Oh, this is bad," said Henrietta. "If this letter does not get to Santa there will be no Christmas for Teresa and her family! Santa will not know where to come." Holding on to the letter Henrietta hopped back inside the house. But she was too late. Teresa and her parents had already gone out. Henrietta did not know how long they would be gone. What could Henrietta do? The letter had to get to Santa!

Just then Henrietta decided that something must be done if Christmas was to be saved. She decided to deliver the letter herself. There was no time to waste. Henrietta did not know that there was a bright red

mailbox right around the corner. Henrietta had not seen the bright red mailbox. Even if she did, she did not know what it was for. You see, little mice don't normally write many letters.

Henrietta rushed up the stairs to grab her oversize purse. She quickly emptied out all of the things she had inside. It would be a very tight fit, but it would have to do as a letter holder. She was soon putting all of her things from her purse into her little home and making ready for her trip.

"I hope Teresa will be OK while I'm gone," she said to herself as she worked to get ready. Before she left she wrote out a little mouse note for Teresa. She told her where she was going. She put the note where Teresa would find it.

Henrietta was soon off again hopping down the steps. She went through the doggie door and out to a snowy City of London. She had begun her adventure to deliver Teresa's letter to Santa Claus. What Henrietta did not know was how very far away Santa lived. She thought that he must live very close because he was so well known. It was going to be a very long trip with many unknown dangers!

Henrietta is Gone!

It did not take long for Teresa to go back to her room after she visited her school. She had to clean her room before lunchtime. As she always did she went to Henrietta's little shoebox house. She moved it to the windowsill so that she would have a lovely view of London while Teresa cleaned her room. After she moved the little house Teresa called out to Henrietta so that she would not get trampled by all of the cleaning.

"Henrietta," she called, but there was no answer. "Henrietta, where have you gone to? I need to clean up before lunch. You know you need to be in a safe place, so stop hiding. We can't play now." But there was still no answer.

Teresa looked under the bed. She looked in the closet and on the shelf. Teresa looked up and down, but she could not find her little mouse. She looked everywhere she could as she called out. Little Henrietta was nowhere to be found. Looking inside Henrietta's little house Teresa soon discovered that Henrietta had taken her oversize purse. She saw that Henrietta had placed all of her purse things in the corner. She could also see that her little mouse had taken her hat, coat, walking stick and her tiny little scarf. It was easy to see that Henrietta had gone out. But where had she gone?

Teresa went to the window and looked out to the front yard. She pressed her nose to the cold glass. From the window she could see the tiny footprints that Henrietta had left on the snow in the yard as she left on her adventure. "Henrietta, where have you gone?" She said. "I hope you will be all right."

Just then Teresa looked down and saw a tiny piece of paper that had fallen from the windowsill. When she picked it up she saw that it was a note from Henrietta.

A big smile came across Teresa's face when she looked at the piece of paper. On the paper were some mouse marks and a tiny mouse footprint. Teresa didn't really know how to read mouse language, but she knew in an instant that it was a note to her from her little Henrietta. It was then that she realized that Henrietta had not just run away. Her little mouse would return when she had finished whatever it was that she had to do.

You see Henrietta had gone out before. She had always left a mouse note for Teresa and then returned. Henrietta was a very independent mouse. She was not a mouse to just sit on windowsills and watch the world go by. Henrietta was a very curious little mouse who was always trying to learn new things. So when Teresa saw that Henrietta was gone, but had left a mouse note, she was not too worried. Henrietta had always come home.

As Teresa looked out of the window she said, "Please be careful Henrietta, and you stay away from all of those mean cats. I will save some nice cheese for you for when you get home."

It soon began to snow even harder than before and it was getting colder. One thing Henrietta did know was that there were always dangers around. When a little American house mouse went on an adventure in old London, no matter where she was going it was dangerous. She would have to be very careful as she went on her way, very careful indeed.

