

How

SANTA CLAUS
CAME TO **M**OLLY
DOYLE



LOUISE ASHBY

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INTRODUCTION

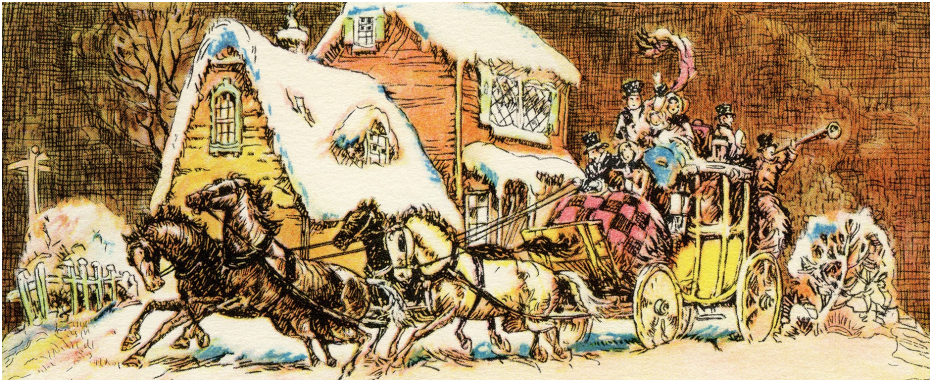
My great aunt Jill Somerwill handed me this story in the form of a packet of brownish pages covered in copperplate writing when I was an ungracious teenager. She thought that as I was a wannabe writer I would appreciate this little story written by my great great grandmother Louise Ashby for my great grandmother Marjorie (who I just about remember as a kind and white-haired lady, by then named Marjorie Pugsley, who generally had a butterscotch about her person).

Aunty Jill enclosed an explanation of the text neatly typed on a strip of paper.

“The three little girls – Barbara, Carrie and Marjorie Ashby were at boarding school in Ireland, at Mrs Gladwin’s School, Wexford from Autumn 1890 until 1894. Their father being Officer in Charge of the Naval Reserve Battery at Rosslare, County Wexford during those years. Their mother, Louise, would write little stories for each of them. This is one she wrote for Marjorie.”

I thought it was pretty cool to read a letter that was 100 years old, but I didn’t really know what to do with the pages – until much later, when I had children of my own. It occurred to me that the story might become part of our Christmas tradition, and then shortly afterwards it occurred to me that this family document deserved more love and care than I had given it. So this is my effort at preserving a bit of my own matrilineal history – it’s my way of giving it a leg-up into the future.

*Clare Law
Tunbridge Wells, November 2015*



One very windy day a few days before Christmas a party of little children were on their way to school in a little village called Ballybreen not very far from Cork. On their way they passed a closed carriage loaded with luggage on the top and filled with merry children inside, five in number, who with their nurse were on their way to Cork to spend Christmas with their Grandma.

“Stand back, stand back,” shouted the children in the road to each other. “Here comes the Squire’s carriage!”

It soon passed by and the children went on their way but stopped when they reached the Squire’s gate for they saw lying about on the grass several leaves torn from a picture-book which apparently had been blown out of the nursery window, which was left wide open. The children trooped in to get them and one little girl, a bright blue-eyed little maiden of seven years old named Molly Doyle, picked up one of the leaves with the picture of Father Christmas with his sack full of toys over his back on one side. On the other, he was by the bedside of a sleeping child filling the little stocking hung there ready for him. Molly could not make it out or understand who the funny-looking old man could be. So she folded it up and put it in her pocket to show Mother and ask her what it meant.

She hurried on to school so anxious for the time to come for leaving. She did hope Mrs Murphy the postmistress would not ask her to day to fetch or carry any thing for her as she very often did, for Molly was a very bright, intelligent child of a very respectable woman who was a widow with two children, little Molly and her twin brother Larry, who was a very delicate, sickly child and the joy of Molly’s and her mother’s heart and his little bed was close under the window where he could see along the road leading to the school and where he used to watch for Molly.

His father had died when he and Molly were but three years old and since then their mother had kept her home and children by going out to work at the Squire’s and selling poultry and the good old priest who lived close by the school said Mrs Doyle’s chickens were the best in the place.

School was out at last and home rushed Molly. “Oh Larry, where’s Mother? I do want her to tell me what this picture means. I found it in the Squire’s garden as I went

past to school. Here's Mother! See, Mother, what is it? What is he doing with the stocking? Look Larry! He is filling it with such a lot of toys."

Her mother took the picture and told her how some little children who had rich mothers and fathers hung their stocking up on a Christmas Eve and in the night, while they were asleep, Father Christmas came and filled them with toys.

"Oh Larry!" said Molly. "Let's you an' me hang ours up and see if he will come to us. Christmas will soon be here now. Aye, Mother, I think he will come if Larry an' me do it. Oh I do wish he would."

Her mother smiled. "Now, my darlings, I do not think it would be any use at all, at all. For you see, he never comes to Ballybreen that I have ever heard and never here to Doyle's Cross" (which was the name Molly's home was called by.) "He would not know who you and Larry are, or where you lived: so it's no use doing it." And her mother went out about her work again, leaving the two children alone.

Larry's eyes were full of tears. "Oh Molly," said he, "Couldn't you write a letter to Father Christmas and tell him about you and me?"

"Oh yes, I will, only don't let us tell Mother. We will surprise her when we show he has been." And there poor Molly's face clouded over. For she remembered that she had neither paper to write on or a penny for a stamp, which she knew all letters that went to post must have because she had so often carried letters to the post for different people on her way to school and if the letters were not already stamped, they gave her a penny to ask Mrs Murphy to put one on. Then a bright idea came into her little wise head where she could try and get a penny.

Just then her mother came in with some tea and sugar, which she had been to the little shop in the village to buy. As soon as Molly caught sight of the nice clean white paper the tea was wrapped in, she asked her mother for it.

When she had emptied the tea she whispered to Larry "I've got the paper. Larry, when mother goes to make Granny's bed I'll write the letter and post it when I go to school."

Molly's mother always went of an evening to put her husband's mother "tidy" as she called it of an evening, the last thing when Molly returned home from school and as Grannie lived a little way up the village, Molly knew she would have time for this wonderful piece of business, the writing to Father Christmas: Poor little child, she had great hopes of his coming.

"Now children," said their mother, "I have fed the chickens and the pig. Be good - I shall not be long. Keep the door shut."

As soon as Molly's mother was out of sight, Molly drew up to the table and got the piece of tea paper to write the letter on.

But first she looked in her mother's workbox to see if she could find an envelope. She had seen her mother get one from there one day and as luck would have it she found one. So she began and we will peep over her shoulder and see what she says:

Dere Father Christmas

*Will you cum to Larry an me Christmas Eve and put som
toys in our stekins. Fer you never did and mother sez you
dout know ware we live so you cant cum. We live at Doyle's
X Larry an me with mother and the chekins and pig. he went
hurt you wen he ses you an Larry an me will suck for you.*

Larry and Molly Doyle.

Doyle's X

Ballybreen

Cork

“There, Larry, I don’t think I can make it better. I only hope the pig will not fly out at him when he comes like he does to folks sometimes.”

“Ah but Molly where are you to get the penny for the stamp?”

“Oh, I know,” says Molly, “I am going early to school and will go to Father Nolan who is always so kind to me and ask him for one.”

The next morning Molly set off and on her way to school she had to pass Father Nolan’s. She went in and met the good old priest coming out of the door. “Ah, Molly, got a letter for me?” said he.

“No, Sir,” said Molly. “It’s my letter but I don’t want anyone to know; but will you please, oh do please, Sir, give me a penny for a stamp?”

He stood and looked at the tiny child, then asked her reason. “Come,” said he, “Do not be afraid, Molly, tell me all about this wonderful letter.”

With that, Molly told him all about it and how she and Larry did so want Father Christmas to come to Doyle’s Cross.

He gave her the penny and also went with her to Mrs Murphy’s to see it was sent off all safe. As soon as Molly left the Post Office, Father Nolan told Mrs Murphy to send it on. They both laughed at the funny address Molly had put on the envelope.

Well, Little Molly’s letter reached the General Post Office in Cork, that being the post town, and while the clerks were busy sorting the letters, they came across Molly’s.

They took it up and looked it all over and asked each other what they should do about it. And while they stood talking about it, it happened that the Squire from Molly's home came in on business, so the clerks showed it to him, knowing him well and that he came from Ballybreen.

"Well," he said, "If you do not mind, I will open it," which he did, and was highly amused and yet deeply touched when he read the little simple letter. He had

already made up his mind what he would do. He gave the letter back to the clerks and went home and had a long talk with his wife.

That day, he went home to his house at Ballybreen, it then being Christmas Eve, and went to see what kind of child Molly was. He called with a message to her mother, who, I have told you, used to work some times at the Squire's.

When he got to the door, the pig ran at him, as poor little Molly was afraid it would do at Father Christmas. Molly's mother came to the door and asked him in. After giving his message, he turned to the children and said, "Well, little people, I suppose you are very anxious for tonight to come, to hang up the stockings. Aye, I know my children are."

Molly turned crimson. So did Larry. But before they could answer, their mother said "Oh, Sir, they keep on to me about Father Christmas, but I tell 'em he never comes here, for he does not know where they live."

"Oh Mother, he does now," says Molly, "For I wrote and a letter to him and told him." And with that she told her mother and the Squire about the letter.

"Well goodbye, children. A very merry Christmas to you all, even the pig!" He went out of the door with a smile on his face and Molly watched the clock, anxious for bed time to come.

At last it was time for bed and before going the children would insist on hanging up their stockings. Their mother could hear them chattering a long time to each other and wondering if he would come and at last they both fell asleep while the mother was busy tidying up the place for the morrow when Grannie was to come up for the day.

Presently, the pig began to grunt as it always did at the approach of strangers when Mrs Doyle heard a thud and a bump at the door and going to the door wondering whatever it could be, she opened the door and called out "Who's there?" and getting no answer she brought a light to see if she could find out what the bumping noise



meant and there she saw a large hamper and a label on it directed to Miss Molly Doyle.

She took it, or rather dragged it, inside for it was very heavy. Then she cut it open and the first thing she saw was a beautiful, large doll, handsomely dressed. There was a box of bricks, two pretty picture books and then two lovely Christmas cakes, all iced all over, one with the name "Molly" and the other "Larry". There were nuts and oranges, sweets and tea and sugar and a joint of beef and a large Christmas pudding.

Poor Mrs Doyle was so bewildered she did not know what to think! But she crept to the beds of her sleeping children and filled their stockings with some of the good things that would go into the stockings and the rest she laid beside.

You can imagine the joy of those two little ones next morning when they awoke and they found Father Christmas had been.

"Ah, Mother," said Molly, "I knew he would come after reading my letter." And, you see, she was right.

THE END