

Children's Literature Reviews

Item 34 of 130

The first Christmas stocking

Elizabeth Winthrop ; illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline.

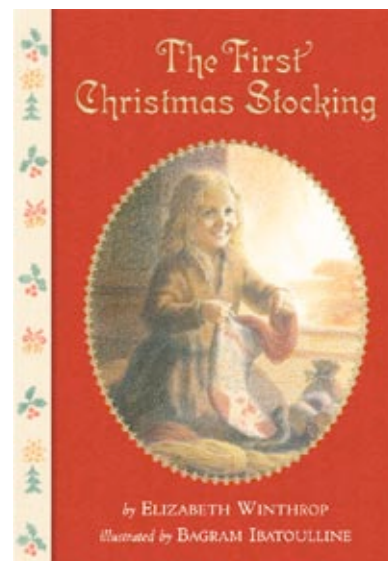
Cataloging in Publication

[Contributor biographical information](#)

[Publisher description](#)

New York : Delacorte Press, 2006.

p. cm.



Annotations:

Grieving for her dead mother, a poor girl finds all her dreams fulfilled when, on Christmas Eve, she hangs above her hearth a stocking she has knitted.

Best Books:

[Best Children's Books of the Year, 2007](#) ; Bank Street College of Education; Outstanding Merit; United States

[Booklist Book Review Stars . Nov. 15, 2006](#) ; United States

Horn Book Guide:

Spring 2007 Picture Books Rating 4, Recommended, with minor flaws.

Reading Measurement Programs:

Accelerated Reader

Interest Level Lower Grade

Book Level 4.7

Accelerated Reader Points **0.5**

Reviews:

Ilene Cooper (Booklist, Nov. 15, 2006 (Vol. 103, No. 6))

Set in a coal-mining town, "long, long ago," this is the story of Claire, who lives with her father, a miner, and her mother, who knits for the town's richer residents. Claire learns the craft, and when her mother dies, she carries on. Two days before Christmas, a wealthy woman orders three pairs of stockings. With little light for warmth or seeing, Claire is unsure she can finish, but she does--only to give five of the stockings to a raggedy boy, who, like Claire, understands what it is like never to be warm. Her furious customer refuses the sixth stocking, which Claire hangs up; the next morning it is filled with gifts, including candles that don't go out. This sentimental story is wrapped in a handsome package--a tall, slim format that provides plenty of space for the dreamy, full-page colored-pencil pictures. It's never clear why the successful knitting business doesn't generate enough income for better indoor light, but such details won't deter children caught up in this Christmas miracle. Category: Books for the Young--Fiction. 2006, Delacorte, \$15.95. Starred Review

Gwynne Spencer (Children's Literature)

This imaginative story creates the legend of the first Christmas stocking and will tug at the heartstrings while inspiring knitters of all ages to "dream your dreams and knit them into the wool," as the young heroine of this

story does. Reminiscent of Andersen's "The Little Match Girl," Claire the young knitter is commissioned by "the rich lady" to create stockings for her three spoiled and overindulged children. But along the steep path on Christmas Eve, a young boy is found freezing. Claire puts one stocking on each of his hands, feet, and one on his head. Of course she is castigated by the "rich lady" and despondently hangs the last stocking by the cold hearth and goes to bed with an empty stomach and a lonely heart. In the morning, all good gifts have come from her stocking: furry slippers, a pouch of tobacco for her father, a bottle of cider, mulling spices, two currant cakes, and all the wool she owed the rich lady at the top of the hill. In the toe of the stocking, Claire finds candles and kindling which never run out during "all the days and months and years ahead." Claire soon has many orders for her stockings, and she could "often be found rocking in her chair with her eyes closed, still dreaming her dreams and knitting them into the wool." A nice classroom tie-in would be to make warm cider and currant cakes as an edible reminder that kindness is always rewarded in one's heart. (A currant cake recipe is available at <http://www.cookingupreading.com>.) 2006, Delacorte Press/Random House Children's Books, \$15.95. Ages 8 to 12.

Sheilah Egan (Children's Literature)

The glowing welcome of the cover prepares the reader for a story both warm and rich with meaning. Claire's family lives at the bottom of the valley in a poor little stone cottage, but their lives are full of love and delight in the meager pleasures purchased with the extra money Claire's mother makes by knitting mittens, scarves, waistcoats, etc. for the wealthy folk of the upper town. Often cold, and having to work without proper light (the sunlight did not often reach their windows and they could not afford the luxury of burning candles), Claire's mother works all day with Claire playing at her feet. The scenes woven by Winthrop's winsome words and portrayed in Ibatoulline's memorable paintings are poignant and heartwarming. Claire learns to knit under her loving mother's guidance-- "Dream your dreams and knit them into the wool." After her mother dies, Claire takes care of the house and cooks for her father, as well as continuing to knit to earn a bit of extra money. This original story has the flavor of an old folk/fairy tale as the plot expands to include a haughty woman who orders three pairs of stockings, a barefoot little boy with frostbitten fingers and icy hair, and the up-swelling of Claire's generous heart. Needless to say her generosity is rewarded with the granting of her wish for warm fires and candles that never burn down--a Christmas miracle that provides years of pleasure that Claire happily shares with the people drawn to her little home "happy (with light) both winter and summer." This explanation of hanging stockings on the fireplace will charm all those who have ever had special Christmas wishes--and as in real life, some are granted and some are not. 2006, Delacorte Press/Random House, \$15.95. Ages 8 to adult.

Kirkus (Kirkus Reviews, November 1, 2006 (Vol. 74, No. 21))

Knitting warm dreams along with wool into her socks, a poor child mysteriously earns a lasting reward with an act of charity on Christmas Eve. Sadly carrying on after her mother's death, little Claire receives a commission for three pairs of stockings just days before Christmas. On her weary way to deliver them, though, she passes a freezing, ragged boy, and is moved to give him two for his feet, two more for his hands, and another for his head. Expecting to have a cold, cheerless Christmas in consequence, she tearfully turns homeward to hang the remaining stocking over the fireplace. In the morning, not only is the sock packed with new wool and other gifts, but the fire in the hearth is lit, and stays lit from then on. Ibatoulline illustrates Winthrop's mid-length tale with snowy scenes in appropriate soft-focus, featuring a very small child huddled in a dim, sparsely furnished room knitting brightly decorated stockings as her mother--and later on, her loving father--hover in the background. The sentimentality is evident but not overwrought in this tale of kindness recompensed. 2006, Delacorte, 40p, \$15.95. Category: Fiction. Ages 8 to 10. © 2006 Kirkus Reviews/VNU eMedia, Inc. All rights reserved.

Horn Book (The Horn Book Guide, Spring 2007)

Claire knits stockings for the wealthy residents of her town. Just before Christmas, she gives a poor boy five of the six socks she had knit for a rich woman. Claire hangs up the sixth stocking, and on Christmas morning she finds that it is bulging with gifts. This wordy story is illustrated with softly luminous, atmospheric paintings. Category: Picture Books. 2006, Delacorte, 40pp, 15.95, 17.99. Ages 4 to 9. Rating: 4: Recommended, with minor flaws.

Dawn Cobb (The Lorgnette-Heart of Texas Reviews (Vol. 19, No. 3))

Claire learns how to knit when she is very young. Her mother always told Claire to knit her dreams into the wool she was using at the time. Claire could knit as beautifully as her mother had before she died. One day, a very wealthy woman asks Claire to knit six stockings for her. The stockings have to be delivered on Christmas Eve. With the money she would earn, Claire would be able to buy coal to warm the home and fill the table with tasty cakes, pudding, and hot cider for her and her father. While delivering the beautiful stockings, Claire passes a young boy who is standing cold and shoeless beside a stone wall. Claire cannot forget the boy in the cold snow.

She seeks out the boy and gives him five of the stockings in an attempt to warm him. Claire delivers the remaining stocking to the wealthy woman, who becomes very angry and refuses to pay her. Claire does not regret her decision. She realizes the warm Christmas she had hoped for will not occur because she helped the young boy. When Claire enters her home, she discovers a warm fire and table filled with tasty treats. Each Christmas after that, the same surprise returns to their home. This is a great book with a wonderful lesson. Fiction. Grades 3-6. 2006, Delacorte, Unpaged., \$15.95. Ages 8 to 12.

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