



## Silver Packages: An Appalachian Christmas Story

*Cynthia Rylant , Chris K. Soentpiet (Illustrator)*

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In Appalachia each Christmas, a boy named Frankie waits beside the tracks for the Christmas Train, which will bring presents to the children who live in coal towns and hollows. Year after year, Frankie hopes that one particular gift a very special gift will be tossed to him from that train. It is this enduring hope that will guide him to the true meaning of the season. Full color.

## **Silver Packages: An Appalachian Christmas Story Details**

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Author : Cynthia Rylant , Chris K. Soentpiet (Illustrator)

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## From Reader Review Silver Packages: An Appalachian Christmas Story for online ebook

### Andrea says

The idea of a Christmas Train in the Appalachian Mountains delivering presents each year was really cool.

The story wasn't told in a warm or inviting way.

"No one knows why he came up into the hills, by why isn't important."

Then a few lines later: "Some say it was old Mr. Crookshank, but others say it was Betty Pritt. But who came along isn't important either."

If it isn't important, then stop saying it.

There was so much writing on most of the pages. I dreaded reading them.

A rich man wrecked in the mountains, and someone helped him and nursed him. He tried to pay them but they wouldn't accept it. Apparently he commands a whole train that he brings into the mountains every year to repay that debt.

It's incredibly stupid of him to expect a doctor's kit, when the old man couldn't possibly know he wants it. And he should have been grateful for getting a present at all. On Christmas morning he found out it was a holster and 3 pairs of socks. He tried not to cry. What a spoiled brat, and for someone who's poor and doesn't get presents, he was especially so.

The watercolor illustrations weren't working. The people were so ugly it was hard to look at them. His stupid family was back there grinning like fools, with thin, squinted eyes, just looking like idiots.

I couldn't believe the next year he still wanted the kit, went to the tracks hoping for it, getting another free gift and not seeming grateful. His feet are warm though from those socks, which still fit. But his hands are cold. I saw gloves in the future. And what do you know? He got two pairs of mittens. Jeez.

And him not crying about getting a police car and mittens is supposed to make him grateful I think. It's not.

3 more years pass--terrible sense of timing here--in which he gets trucks, balls, games, hats and scarves.

Frankie grew into a man, worked in the city but still remembers being given presents he needed for the cold, and he knows he owes a debt.

It was so ridiculously stupid how he went home, waited for the train, and then watched this dumb girl trip over the package that landed on the ground. Think she's okay, man. All she did was trip in the snow, not get hit by the train.

"the grown man does run now, but not for a train. Not for a rich man in a wool coat. For a little girl."  
Ugh. That is trying way too hard.

And so freaking aggravatingly, he doesn't even get to talk to the old man--who's amazingly still alive--because he has to take care of this waif who fell down in the snow. I bet she's really hurt. He didn't get to

even wave at the man. What is up with that? And the first year there he didn't say thanks because he was out of breath. What a great idea that he never shows gratitude. Awesome.  
He tells her she'll be alright, he'll make sure. Um, yeah. I think she really is all right. But he's a doctor, so it's a great story...not.

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## Heather says

I've been meaning to read this.  
How exciting: a train going by delivering presents.  
It was a little hard to read the words on the second page, with the car.  
'his car just took itself right over the side of a ridge, and the man slumped in that car hurting and scared.'  
This could have been worded better.  
It says they didn't know who saved him, Mr. Crookshank or Betty Pritt. Then it shows a woman taking care of him. The drawings aren't great. The woman looks a little mad.  
So because he was taken care of and nursed after the wreck, he repaid them by having the Christmas Train come to the mountains every December and throw presents to the children.  
'And for some, it will be the only present they receive.' That's sweet.  
It's weird how everyone is waiting on one side of the tracks and Frankie is standing on the other by himself.  
I found this too dramatic: 'but he is determined to wait, even if his feet and all the rest of him become ice.'  
I like the excitement of the train coming, some mothers are crying.  
I didn't know he wanted a specific present. What are the chances of getting a doctor kit?  
I was annoyed that he was so out of breath he couldn't yell thank you to the 'rich man' after he got his gift. He did wave, though so that was nice.  
I wonder how long the 'rich man' has been doing this? He can't do it forever.  
I feel for Frankie when he opened the gift on Christmas morning and didn't get what he was hoping. It turned out to be a cowboy holster & three pairs of red socks. 'Frankie looks at his mother and father and brothers and sisters and tried not to cry.'  
It's good he had socks though. That's practical.  
The ppl are ugly and not realistic. It's heavy.  
I see where this is going. He's waiting for the train the next year, and this time his hands are cold.  
I didn't like how I turned the page and saw him with a police car, so I already knew he got that. He does get mittens.  
For the next three years he gets trucks, balls and games, mittens, socks and hats and scarves.  
Whoa! I turn the page and it's a middle aged man. I hate time jumps like this! He moved away, out of the hills. He looks back and remembers how his feet were freezing and he received socks, his hands were freezing and he got mittens. His throat was getting blasted by the wind and he got a scarf. His ears were cold and he got a hat.  
It's weird how each year a different body part was cold. Wouldn't they all have been cold, each year?  
How old is grown up anyway? How old is he?!?  
'& Frankie remembers something about owing a debt.' Wow.  
So he remembered the story.  
It said his brothers and sisters still lived there and were waiting for him. How old are they?  
I'm surprised to see the 'rich man' on the back of the train in his blue coat with his silver package. Frankie is a grown man, how old is this guy?  
'& he nearly runs after the train, so strong are his memories. This grown man nearly runs after a silver package.' Aw, that's sweet. He's remembering the little child in him.  
He sees a little girl trip while trying to get her packages so he goes running to her.

He wipes off her tears, although idk why she's crying. She got a present and only tripped in the snow. At least she got a present. It seems like he only throws one off.

This little girl looks sickly.

'He had meant to wave to the rich man. But there wasn't time.' OMG!

-"you'll be all right," he tells her. "I'll make sure."

He pulls open his kit to look for a band-aid.

"Name's frank." He smiles. "I'm a doctor."

I had seen a doctors bag when the girl tripped so I figured he was a doctor. But I guess kids might not notice that.

This was supposed to be this big thing. The story coming full circle. But it didn't feel that way.

I thought when he said owe a debt, he would go talk to the rich man and explain how he helped him, and how his gifts kept him warm as a kid. Or team up with him and help pass out presents.

I did not think he'd get to the train, see a girl that just so happens to trip, go help her and then offer her a bandaid that I'm not sure how she needed, because she tripped in the snow, & then forget all about thanking/helping the guy who helped him as a kid.

The girl tripping was a whole setup for frank to announce he was a doctor. It veered away from the original story. & robbed us of a true ending.

It also didn't fit the description. It said he learned the true meaning of Christmas. I thought he'd realize that Christmas isn't about gifts. After reading, you'd think he realize it's not about things you want but things you need. But he only realized that the man had given him things he'd needed each year as he needed them. Then he announced all hero-like that he's a doctor.

Ooh wouldn't it have been nice for frank to tell the rich man how he'd helped him, and for frank to join him in handing out presents to the kids, and then take over for him some day?

Idk what they're talking about saying he wasn't Santa Claus, because this guy seems immortal.

There really wasn't a moral to the story.

It showed me why I had planned to read this first among the books I got. It didn't fit the description or what I thought this story would be.

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## **Cat says**

Wonderful Christmas story! This was the first time I had ever heard of the Appalachian Christmas Train and was intrigued about it enough to look it up and discover it was real and that 2018 will be its 76th run!

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## **Wilted says**

My mother used to cry at this book. This seemed, at the time, to be the result of some mysterious and alien disease only contracted by those over the age of twenty-one. Not one to question the rituals of the adult world (which was probably responsible for some terribly stunted growth on my part, I'm sure), I never looked past the Christmas card pictures at the story.

I was not an illiterate child. There was nothing I liked more than a good story, but let's face it. My mother would have gotten more appreciation for this book out of the toaster, for all I understood it. Oh, the story got through to me. It just failed to resonate emotionally. How was I supposed to appreciate the acts of kindness in the Appalachians, or even understand the reasons behind the delivery of the titular packages? Consider for

a moment the classic *Snowy Day*. Peter sets out from home, mostly banal things happen. But it's there: it's presented almost magically, in a way which children understand. When Peter's snow melts, it's a moment of genuine dismay. The triumphs and struggles in *Silver Packages* barely crossed my mind. It's one thing to read a child a story. It's another to have it mean something to them. The main character's dream of becoming a doctor is straightforward enough, but few children consider the obstacles he faces. If he wants to be a doctor when he grows up, won't he? A child does not imagine the hardships involved, the challenges. A children's book shouldn't be touching because of external influences. It should speak to the child, and that is *Silvers Packages'* greatest fault. *The Polar Express* has much more in the way of an intriguing, straightforward Christmas story.

Considering the fact that the thing I most vividly remember about this book is the brilliant silver wrappings which were so keenly illustrated, I would have probably been more stimulated by an hour with some aluminum foil.

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### **Heather says**

After a wealthy man is injured in a car accident in Appalachia, he is nursed back to health by the locals only for them to refuse payment when he is well again. As a thank you, the wealthy man returns on a train every 23rd of December bringing Christmas gifts to the poverty stricken children of the area. One little boy hopes very much for a toy doctor's kit. He receives other toys as well as warm socks, mittens and a hat throughout the years. The boy returns to the mountains as an adult with his own special gifts to give. Illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet.

This is a touching and beautiful Christmas story that opens up the ideas of wants versus needs and unconditional giving. Children will appreciate the story of the Santa Train and the gifts it brings to the poor children, but this book really reaches out to adult readers who will really appreciate the giving spirit. The illustrations capture the setting, especially those of the train and how large and full of hope it was to the children. An excellent addition to a holiday bookshelf.

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### **Gina says**

This is a wonderful story based on a true event - the yearly Santa Train in the Appalachian mountains. Legend has it that a rich man who was traveling through the mountains had an accident. The townspeople saved his life, and every year to repay their kindness, he sent out a train full of gifts, and tossed silver packages off the train to the children. One little boy always hoped for a doctor's kit, but never got one. After the little boy grows up, he becomes successful and desires to return to the mountains - as their doctor!

I enjoyed this book! Full of emotion and beautiful illustrations. I highly recommend it!

This book would be good as a Christmas read aloud to grades K-4. Discussion topics could be gratefulness, following your dreams, and provision.

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### **Michelle Glatt says**

My favorite holiday story of all time. I read it to 6th graders every year.

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### **Jenny says**

A rich man was in an accident in Appalachia and the people cared for him. They refused his offers to pay them. So every year he returns at Christmas time in a Christmas train and drops silver packages for the children do the town...often the only presents they receive. Frankie is a young boy who waits each year for the train to come, always hoping it will have a doctor kit for him. It never does but does have other beloved objects. I love these lines the most, "...just when it seemed his feet would freeze like the snow, a man on a train had brought socks. Just when it seemed his fingers were hardening to ice, the man had brought mittens. Just when the cold wind was cutting sharp as a blade into his throat, the man had brought a scarf. And just when Frankie's ears were numb with red cold, the man had brought a hat." I hope that, in some small way, the things I do impact others around me as this man's gifts impacted Frankie. And that I can help my children to see that it truly is better to give than receive.

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### **Karen says**

A story showing how God always provides what we need even more than what we want and yet never forgets our wants as well...krb 12/6/16

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### **Elizabeth says**

A lovely story that never fails to make my audience gasp with surprise at the end. Tears abound, too. Just perfection.

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### **Jen says**

(The devil in me wants to begin with The Lonely Island.

"Well, you know it's Christmas, and my heart is open wide...One: Cut a hole in a box"  
Stop it devil. I'm resisting you. Think of the children, Jen.)

This is not a bad book. I read it alone and liked it. It's a Christmas story of giving, receiving, and social responsibility. And that's not bad. There are a lot of stories with lessons in them that are done pretty well (My personal fave is The Lorax). Anyhow, I like this one okay, and this book resonates if the person reading the book wants to be reminded about giving, receiving, and social responsibility. The illustrations are not bad either. And plenty of readers look for books just like this at Christmas. And that is kind of what bothers me about this book.

I have a not-so-sugarplum vision that ruins a story like this for me (and possibly others). In this vision, a misty-eyed adult community leader who is not a constant reader but just loves this children's book (it just blesses my heart and I know it can bless others!!!) is tasked with squeezing a treacly (thank you DK for keeping this word fresh in my mind) reading of this book into a 30 minute "look at us and our wonderful community reading" time slot- right before pictures with Santa.

The vision has literacy as this golden goose- prized, precious and rare. The goose is so rare that the violent must take it by force and rape it into reproduction so that there might be literate peoples and significant literacy events everywhere. So this captured goose of an idea is brought out and many people ooh and aah over this worthy caged bird. The place is packed, it is Christmas, the time of community and smiling, of taking pictures with cellphone cameras of overdressed children sticky with candy cane. The story, (a touching one in its beginning that now has become, well, you decide...

<http://www.dickensoncounty.net/santat....>

based on a real Santa Train begins and the reader tries to hammer home the moral lesson (Look children! Stay still and listen to the story! Not all get lots of presents on Christmas! Some boys and girls have nothing! See this boy? He is kind and grateful but also sad! This is reading! This is awareness! Pay attention! Isn't reading fun? Recognize the value of the golden goose before you!).

But the children don't like the story. It is long and they can't focus and they are sitting next to other children they don't know. They know the grown-ups see a goose and they do too but for them it is not golden. It is trapped, like they are, criss-crossed applesauced. They are tired, the tags on their velvety Christmas outfits itch, and they are sweaty and just trying to keep from mauling the weepy reading adult so that they can see Santa and tell him what the hell they want. This vision scares me. The Santa Train website link scares me. The whole idea of the golden goose given to community organizers to trot out scares me. And yet this book isn't bad, it's a solid three point five on my (admittedly very arbitrary) scale. I'm worried that this book, this perfectly fine book will attract the right reader with all the best intentions carried out in all the wrong ways. And carrying this book out as a nice Christmas story to force feed new readers might ruin this story and ruin the right readers' best intentions entirely.

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### **Foxytocin says**

A sweet and thoughtful story that addresses several important issues quite well: want vs need, the significance of giving with no strings attached, introspection....all very adult issues but portrayed in a way that thoughtful children will understand. This is the sort of book that when shared with our children, launches all sorts of conversations we should all probably have with our kids....some questions easier to answer than others.

It's also a tear-jerker for those adults who understand all too well. Poignant.

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### **Kim says**

Selected as Christmas Read Aloud for my 3rd/4th grade students. Introduced story by talking about the real

Christmas Train. Students were intrigued and very excited to hear the story. Also talked about how important childhood experiences and memories are, how they shape our future actions.

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**Ryann Lund says**

This is a really wonderful book. I love how the old man helps pay back the people by giving them Christmas presents off the back of the train. And frank gets to be a doctor when he grows up.

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**Cindy says**

Beautiful story with a moral, typical of Appalachian folk lore! I loved this book! And, the illustrations are awesome! Highly recommended!

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