

# Three Impoverished Maidens or The Story of The Dowries

There was a man, once rich, who had fallen on hard times. Now poor, he had three daughters of an age to be married. In those days a young woman's family had to have something of value, a [dowry](#), to offer prospective bridegrooms. The larger the dowry, the better the chance a young woman would find a good husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to marry. This poor man's daughters, without dowries, were therefore destined to be sold into slavery, or worse.

Word of the family's misfortune reached Nicholas, who had the wealth inherited from his parents. Coming in secret by night, he tossed a bag of gold into the house. It sailed in through an open window, landing in a stocking\* left before the fire to dry. What joy in the morning when the gold was discovered! The first daughter soon wed.

Not long after, another bag of gold again appeared mysteriously. The second daughter was married. The father, now very anxious to know who the secret benefactor was, kept watch during the night.

A third bag of gold landed inside the house and the watchful father leaped up and caught the fleeing donor. "Ah, Nicholas, it is you!" cried the father, "You have saved my daughters from certain disaster."

Nicholas, embarrassed, and not wishing to be known, begged the man to keep his identity secret. "You must thank God alone for providing these gifts in answer to your prayers for deliverance."



*Detail: The Life & Miracles of Saint Nicholas*

Artist: [Alexander Boguslawski](#)

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## NOTE

\* This is the origin of the custom of hanging a stocking for Santa Claus. In some versions the story has a shoe, leading to the European custom of leaving shoes for St. Nicholas.