

# Colin's Christmas Candle

by Barbara Raftery

Colin walked slowly home from school, scuffing° his feet. He looked across the hills at the little Irish fishing village. It did not seem like Christmas Eve. Perhaps this was because it still had not snowed.

But Colin knew there was another reason why it did not seem like Christmas—a reason he did not dare° whisper even in his heart.

He looked toward the lead-coloured° sea. There was not a single ship on the horizon. And seven days ago his father's fishing schooner° had been due home.

"I'll bring you a sheep dog pup° from the Shetland Isles," Colin's father told him the morning he left. "Ye'll have it a week before Christmas, I am certain."

But now it was Christmas Eve. Colin looked toward the lighthouse, high on the hill. Seven days ago, a storm had short-circuited° the lighthouse wires. The great beacon's light had been snuffed out°. For seven days, there had been no light to guide his father's ship.

Colin pushed open the door of his cottage. "We'll need more peat° for the fire, Colin," said his mother as he entered. "It has burned itself out. And it's near time to light the Christmas candle°."

"I'm not carin' much about lightin' a candle, Mother," he said. "Aye, I know, for I'm not carin' much either," replied his mother. "But everybody in Ireland lights a candle on Christmas Eve. Even when there's sadness° in the house, you must light the candle. It shows that your house and heart are

open to strangers. Come now, I've two candles, one for each of us. If you gather° some peat, we'll be ready for supper soon." Colin nodded° and went outside.

He led their donkey° up the hill so that he could gather the peat. "Who cares about a silly candle," he said as he glanced° toward the lighthouse, "when there's not so much as a beam° of light to guide a fishin' boat home?" The donkey shook his head and brayed° sadly, as if he understood.

But while he was staring at the lighthouse, Colin had an idea. It hit him like a gust° of warm spring wind. He started running up the long hill. When he came to the lighthouse, he pounded° on the door.

Mr. Duffy, the keeper, opened the door. "What's got into you, young fellow? You startled° me—and on Christmas Eve, too!" "Mr. Duffy," gasped Colin, "how did you used to light the beacon°?"

"Why, with electric batteries. But they are blown, my boy. Dead as can be! And we won't be able to replace them till after the new year."

"No, I mean, how did you light the lighthouse before there were such things as batteries?"

"Well, they used an oil lamp. It's down in the cellar. But we've no oil to burn, lad."

"Would kerosene° light the lamp?" asked Colin, holding his breath.

"Well, I suppose," Mr. Duffy mused°. "But don't go gettin' silly ideas in your head, lad. You wouldn't find even a pitiful° quart of spare° kerosene in this village. Everyone is so poor for money this year ..."

Colin was gone before Mr. Duffy could finish his sentence.

Down the hill he ran, back to the cottage. Quickly he gathered four pails° from the kitchen. Then he darted° out the door.

*schlurfen*

*wagen*

*bleifarben*

*Schooner*

*Welpen*

*kurzgeschlossen*

*ausgelöscht*

*Torf*

*Kerze*

*Traurigkeit*

*sammeln*

*nicken*

*Esel*

*blicken*

*Strahl*

*brüllen*

*Böe*

*klopfen*

*erschrecken*

*Leuchtturm*

*Petroleum*

*nachsinnen*

*erbärmlich*

*überschüssig*

*Eimer; losschiessen*

Colin could see candles glowing in nearly every cottage in the valley below him. A candle on Christmas Eve meant that a stranger would be welcome and given whatever he asked. He didn't stop running until he came to the first house.

"Could you spare me just a half cup of kerosene from your lamp?" he asked. Colin went to every house where a candle shone° in the window.

*scheinen*  
*schmerzhaft*

In one hour he had filled two pails. Slowly and painfully° he carried them up to the lighthouse door. He knocked.

"What's this?" Mr. Duffy asked. "Laddie, this won't keep the lamp burnin' for more than an hour or so."

"I'll get more!" Colin shouted as he started down the hill. "It's early still."

After three more long hours, Colin had gathered five more pails of kerosene. He was on his way with the sixth pail, when the tower suddenly flickered with light. A great beam spread out over the valley. It stretched° toward the dark heart of the sea like a finger pointing° home. Mr. Duffy had lighted the lamp!

*strecken*  
*zeigen*

It was very late when Colin reached home. His mother jumped from her seat near the fire.

"Colin, where have you been? You've had no supper, nor lighted your candle!"

"Oh, Mother! I've lighted a candle, and a big one! It's a secret, so I can't tell you—yet. But it was a huge° candle indeed!"

*riesig*  
*tief*

Colin slept soundly° that night, dreaming of candles. Suddenly, a great shouting aroused° him from his sleep.

*aufwecken*

"The boat! The boat has come in!"

A hundred voices were spinning° in his head. "The light—'twas the light they said—the light from the beacon. They were only ten miles away after all. The boat was just a-driftin'° in the fog, lost."

*herumwirbeln*  
*treibend*

Dawn was breaking. Colin dashed to the window. People were milling around° outside. His mother was running toward the harbour. It was true! There floated his father's schooner, standing out black as coal against the grey of the sea.

*Morgendämmerung*  
*umherlaufen*

Colin darted across the yard and raced for the harbour. He felt a moist° wind on his face. It was beginning to snow.

*feucht*

Oh, it was Christmas morning all right, falling right from heaven and into his heart!

