

**The Cribmakers Trip To Heaven** a story by *Reimmichl* (Sebastian Reiger (1867-1953)  
a catholic priest and poet in the Tyrol, Austria written in the 1920's) - adapted by eldrbarry

[ Published in Anthologies: Behold the Star, Home For Christmas] A Christmas Morality Story / Play  
Can be adapted into a Christmas program.

Note “Crib” = “a humble dwelling” also the root for a “creche” ie Manger or other religious Scene

**Willibald Krautmann and Christmas** – these two things belonged together like a door and its hinges, like a clock and its face, like a bell and its tower. The whole year round Willibald Krautmann thought, dreamed and prepared things for Christmas. During his lifetime, he carved more than a thousand crib figures and had built sixty manger scenes and had been present at every cribmaker's conference in Innbruck in Tyrol.

Willibald Krautmann has a small round stocky figure, which was much to small for his ambitious soul. Often his soul would inflate itself mightily and whisper in his ear *“Willibald, after all you are the greatest artist and cribmaster throughout the whole land – there is hardly a single soul so highly respected in heaven as you. When you go to heaven some day, they will fling all the gates wide open to welcome you.”*

Now it seems that Willibald Krautmann had died, and just the night before Christmas eve, peacefully in his bed. Now he was energetically trotting up the steep road to heaven and talking to himself. ..  
*“Now you will see, my dear old Willibald, how the Child Christ honors those whom he wants to honor. He fetched you just before the most beautiful feast day in heaven. Perhaps they need you to fix the heavenly crib scene for them. Though this is awfully short notice...”*

Thinking about this, his progress seemed too slow. The road was long, it was winter and cold. The paths slippery. He thought: If they really wanted him in heaven, they could have at least sent a **carriage** for him – didn't have to be fancy. And what were **all those angels** doing – not a single one to meet him here, Willibald Krautmann, was no mere worker. He doesn't need a legion, but a dozen or so as an escort would be proper.”

**No heavenly carriage appeared, nor and escort of angels**. He walked wearily onward in silence, darkness fell, the moon and stars rose, his tired strength failing him. Then he saw the heavenly Jerusalem – a wonderful city on a silver hill, with palaces and towers of gold. Inside a wonderful light shined, much brighter than the sun. The windows shimmered in hundreds of colors. He looked and looked.

*“But why isn't anyone coming? Maybe they aren't ready for me yet, or don't know I'm already here.”* He stood on a star and waved his hat and **shouted with a loud voice: “HALLOO!”** A little angel popped up, looked out, then disappeared. He waited expecting bells to ring and cannons to shoot. But all he heard were some faint chimes and “Silent Night” almost to faint to hear.

Then he thought *“Oh, its going to be a surprise – soon the gates will fling open and the choirs of angels and archangels will stream out to sing for Willibald Krautmann.”* Not that he liked surprises, but *if that is what gives joy in heaven, that's O.K.* But though he hurried on and stood before heaven's gates, there was nothing! It was quiet like no one was there. For a bit he thought the angels were **little rascals, playing a joke** -wanting to make him stand like a beggar. Just like he used to play with the figures he carved. **But this joke has gone too far on him, Willibald Krautmann, who worked all his life for Christmas!** Finally he sat down in a sulk.

The doors suddenly opened – Peter giving directions – a crowd of angels came out and flew off. They didn't even notice him. The doors slammed shut! Have they forgotten, in all their Christmas bustle he was coming? He will just have to make himself noticed. **He leaped up on the bell rope, swinging as the bell rang loud.**

**Peter stuck his head out the window.** *“Who is pulling our gate bell out of its post?  
What kind of ruffian are you?”*

*“It's I, Willibald Krautmann, well known artist and carver of Christmas Figures.”*

*“Willibald Krautmann, what an odd name, I don't know it. You want in?”*

*“I have been waiting here for hours.”*

*“Well, I will just have to check the book ”* He hurried off, shutting the window.

*“Well thanks a lot for your welcome.”* Willibald said sarcastically.

*“They don't know Me, Willibald Krautmann, and they have to go check the book!”*

Finally Peter returned., shuffling pages for a long time.

*“Yes, Yes, that's right! **Willibald Krautmann! Its not your time. You can not enter.**”*

**“I .. I, .Willibald Krautmann. can't enter? I would just like to know why not!”**

Peter leaved through the book *“I can tell you that . . . **You have been arrogant and vain and proud of your own works, and considered other's worthless in comparision – that nobody makes anything as fine as you.**”*

*“Well, heavenly gatekeeper – you are making a fuss over **such trifles. You used to be a fisher, and catcher of fish has no idea what an artist feels.** In my lifetime, I have set up more than half a hundred Christmas cribs. I have awakened thoughts of heaven in human hearts and caused much Christmas joy ... and people have taken good examples from my figures.”*

*“Yes, that's true, but **I can't scratch out the arrogance!**”*

*“Well every one has their faults – I'm not so conceited to think I am one of the greatest saints . . . “*

**Willibald Krautmann,** You have carved so many manger scenes,  
but it appears **you have missed the very point of them.**

*It is **not** the singing angels in the skies **nor** the wise men with their camels and treasures. . . .*

*. . . My fellow carvers say my angels and kings are spectacular . . .*

*. . . It is that **helpless baby Child Christ, laying in rough manger in a dirty stable,** surrounded by dumb animals and a few poor shepherds.  
**Born into humanity in great humility, of a virgin, without sin,  
that he could be an advocate for sinners in heaven.**”*

*“But wait my fellow, there are other things written here. . . You have been **lacking in patience.**  
When things don't go smoothly you break out in **rude anger** . . .”*

*“. . Pardon, that was **holy anger** when the evil one hid my tools, or pushed over my crib scene in a heap . . .”*

*“The things you said were anything but prayers.”*

*“who doesn't do things they regret when angry.*

**A least I never did damage, like some. I never struck the ear off of anybody!”**

*“Well if you are **trying to argue some kind of legal case** for being here,  
you had better **look around for an advocate and defender.**”*

*“Let me in and I will find one.”*

*“You cannot come in, you are too impure.*

*“Where do I find an advocate on earth? I unfortunately don't have a friend who could speak for me. I have no time for other people. I have had my Christmans work to do!”*

*“And it is true you have had no time for people.  
The heaviest debt on your account is that you have had far too little love for your neighbor;  
you are expecting mercy in heaven, but you've neglected mercy on earth.*

*Nothing means as much as a warm-hearted gift of love for those in need..  
What of that homeless widow with three hungry children you turned away last Christmas Eve?”*

*“Heavens, I had to use my coins for expenses – the Christmas work I did.  
Gilding those statues was sinfully expensive!”*

*“You had enough for drinks afterward. . . “*

*“That was just a little joyful celebration, a small one, and because of Christmas.”*

*“Are you lying as well! Those were two of the most expensive bottles of wine. Lying is detested here.”*

*“St Peter, don't take it ill! Little white lies happen.  
I read of one who lied his way out out his need three times before the cock crowed.”*

*“But he wept for it his whole life long, while you just cover up and soften your sins!”  
thundered Peter, “Go where you belong!” Slammed the window shut.*

Willibald Krautmann, for the first time, realized this was **in bitter earnest. He was shut out of heaven.** He knocked humbly on the window, and begged and whined. Peter would not listen. He pulled again and again on the bell rope, but it no longer made a sound. He wandered around the walls and saw a little window with bright light shining through it. He peeked in and saw the celebration in heaven – light and light and more light all radiating from a man with pierced hands in the center – and an undying love that delights heart and soul. Then a million voices began to sing. *“Gloria in Excelsis Deo – Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men in whom He is pleased.”*

**Willibald Krautmann's heart burned within him**, an enormous longing, a pain like death. He could not speak, or cry out – but only in the bottom of his heart, *“Forgive me my sin.”* And he began to weep, louder and louder, the window glass wet with his tears.

Suddenly, the glass shattered, everything went dark, he felt himself falling down and down . . .

And he heard a well-known voice, *“What's the matter? What's going on for heaven's sake?”*

He opened his eyes, he lay in his room in his bed. His wife was shaking him. It became clear to him that he was awakening from a deep dream.

*“What's the matter with you, you silly fool?”* cried his wife.  
*“You are groaning and whimpering as if you had one of your ears cut off.”*

*“Oh, I have been in heaven”* He replied.

*“A fine heaven where you yell and gasp like that!”*

*“Quiet, Woman, you don't understand. Its hard to explain, but I will try to tell you about it.”*

But Willibald Krautmann only told his wife half of what he experienced. But from that day “Baldy” was a changed man – more thoughtful of others, generous to the point of losing money. Friendly with everybody, and patient with all – he had found a friend in Heaven. And he still made Christmas Cribs – but now it was that child in the manger that mattered most to him. His trip to heaven was yet to come.

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This story from in SE Austria (1920's) is similar to Dicken's *A Christmas Carol*, or the film *It's a Wonderful Life*. The Tyrol is known for its wood carvers and it's Grandfather Clocks and Manger Scenes.