



# The Last Gift

The Christmas Stories of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

Edited, with an Introduction, by **THOMAS RUYS SMITH**

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (1852-1930) was one of the most popular American writers at the turn of the twentieth century, and her annual Christmas stories appeared in magazines and periodicals across the globe. Since then, the extraordinary stories that once delighted her legions of fans every festive season have gone largely out of print and unread. Now, for the first time, *The Last Gift* presents a collection of Freeman's best Christmas writing, introducing these funny, poignant, provocative, and surprisingly timely holiday tales to a new generation of readers.

**THOMAS RUYS SMITH** is professor of American literature and culture at the University of East Anglia. He is the author or editor of a number of books, including *Deep Water: The Mississippi River in the Age of Mark Twain* and *Christmas Past: An Anthology of Seasonal Stories from Nineteenth-Century America*.

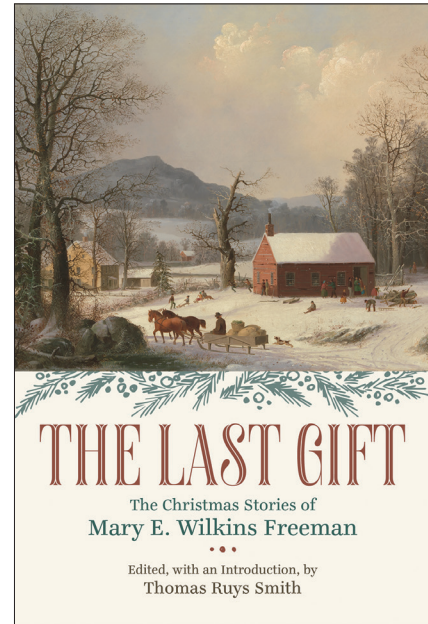
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## PRAISE FOR *THE LAST GIFT*

"Thomas Ruys Smith's edition of Freeman's Christmas stories is a revelation! All our pre-surreptions about holiday stories being drenched in sentimentality are demolished by the ways in which Freeman probes the multiple meanings inherent in the acts of giving and receiving gifts and exposes the forms of both solitude and communion inherent in Christmas. This collection transforms our understanding of the season and enhances the literary reputation of this remarkable author."—**Alfred Bendixen**, executive director of the *American Literature Association*

"A lovely and varied collection of Freeman's often-neglected Christmas stories. Smith's lively introduction contextualizes Freeman's portrayal of the holiday season, in all of its complexity, and the domestic tensions that Christmas evoked for nineteenth-century women."—**Leah Blatt Glasser**, author of *In a Closet Hidden: The Life and Work of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*

"*The Last Gift* will prove anyone wrong who once said with Mark Twain, 'I hate Xmas stories.' Funny and grave, delicate and ironical, Freeman's Christmas stories talk about old age and queer desires, ecoanxiety and the love of trees, class tension, capitalistic drives, and the beauty of an old child braving it all to have her 'Christmas once.' A gift for all, and for all seasons."—**Cécile Roudeau**, coeditor of *New Perspectives on Mary E. Wilkins Freeman: Reading with and against the Grain*



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