

12 Days of Christmas

Not just a delightful (or perhaps annoying) rhyme set to music, this song has a serious foundation in history. The song, first published in England in 1780 without music as a chant or rhyme, is thought to be French in origin. Catholics in England during the years 1558 until 1829, when Parliament finally emancipated Catholics, were prohibited from any public or private practice of their faith by law. The song in question was a "Catechism Song", intended to help young Catholics learn the tenets of their faith - a memory aid. The song teaches the tenets by associating each with a number, 1-12, as follows: 12 Drummers Drumming: the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostle's creed. 11 Pipers Piping: the eleven Apostles. 10 Lords-A-Leaping: the ten Commandments. 9 Ladies Dancing: the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit. 8 Maids-A-Milking: the eight Beatitudes. 7 Swans-A-Swimming: the seven Sacraments. 6 Geese-A-laying: the six days of Creation. 5 Golden Rings: the first five Books of the old Testament, the "Pentateuch". 4 Calling Birds: the four Gospels. 3 French Hens: Faith, Hope & Charity, the three Virtues. 2 Turtle Doves: the Old and New Testaments. 1 Partridge in a Pear Tree: Christ. And who is "My true Love"? that would be God Himself. And so, it seems, the longest carol also has a significant history to it.

Twelve thank-you notes of Christmas

Dec 25	Dec. 26	Dec. 27
<i>My dearest darling Edward,</i>	<i>Beloved Edward,</i>	<i>My darling Edward,</i>
<i>What a wonderful surprise has just greeted me! That sweet partridge, in that lovely little pear-tree; what an enchanting, romantic, poetic present!</i>	<i>The two turtle-doves arrived this morning, and are cooing away in pear-tree as I write. I'm so touched and grateful!</i>	<i>You do think of the most original presents! Who ever thought of sending anybody three French hens? Do they really come all the way from France? It's a pity we have no chicken coops, but I expect we'll find some.</i>
<i>Bless you, and thank you.</i>	<i>With undying love, as always,</i>	<i>Anyway, thank you so much; they are lovely.</i>
<i>Your deeply loving</i>	<i>Emily.</i>	<i>Your devoted Emily.</i>
<i>Emily.</i>		

<p>Dec. 28</p> <p><i>Dearest Edward,</i></p> <p><i>What a surprise! Four calling birds arrived this morning. They are very sweet, even if they do call rather loudly, they make telephoning almost impossible - but I expect they'll calm down when they get used to their new home. Anyway, I'm very grateful, of course I am.</i></p> <p><i>Love from Emily.</i></p>	<p>Dec. 29</p> <p><i>Dearest Edward,</i></p> <p><i>The postman has just delivered five most beautiful gold rings, one for each finger, and all fitting perfectly! A really lovely present! Lovelier, in a way, than birds, which do take rather a lot of looking after. The four that arrived yesterday are still making a terrible row, and I'm afraid none of us got much sleep last night. Mother says she wants to use the rings to "wring" their necks. Mother has such a sense of humor. This time she's only joking, I think, but I do know what she means.</i></p> <p><i>Still, I love the rings.</i></p> <p><i>Bless you,</i></p> <p><i>Emily.</i></p>	<p>Dec. 30</p> <p><i>Dear Edward,</i></p> <p><i>Whatever I expected to find when I opened the front door this morning, it certainly wasn't six socking great geese laying eggs all over the porch. Frankly, I rather hoped that you had stopped sending me birds. We have no room for them, and they've already ruined the croquet lawn. I know you meant well, but let's call a halt, shall we?</i></p> <p><i>Love,</i></p> <p><i>Emily.</i></p>
<p>Dec. 31</p> <p><i>Edward,</i></p> <p><i>I thought I said NO MORE BIRDS. This morning I woke up to find no more than seven swans, all trying to get into our tiny goldfish pond. I'd rather not think what's happened to the goldfish. The whole house seems to be full of birds, to say nothing of what they leave behind them, so please, please, stop!</i></p> <p><i>Your Emily.</i></p>	<p>Jan. 1</p> <p><i>Frankly, I prefer the birds. What am I to do with eight milkmaids? And their cows! Is this some kind of a joke? If so, I'm afraid I don't find it very amusing.</i></p> <p><i>Emily.</i></p>	<p>Jan. 2</p> <p><i>Look here, Edward,</i></p> <p><i>This has gone far enough. You say you're sending me nine ladies dancing. All I can say is, judging from the way they dance, they're certainly not ladies. The village just isn't accustomed to seeing a regiment of shameless viragos, with nothing on but their lipstick, cavorting round the green, and it's Mother and I who get the blame. If you value our friendship, which I do (less and less), kindly stop this ridiculous behavior at once!</i></p> <p><i>Emily.</i></p>

<p>Jan. 3</p> <p><i>As I write this letter, ten disgusting old men are prancing up and down all over what used to be the garden, before the geese and the swans and the cows got at it. And several of them, I have just noticed, are taking inexcusable liberties with the milkmaids. Meanwhile the neighbors are trying to have us evicted. I shall never speak to you again.</i></p> <p><i>Emily.</i></p>	<p>Jan. 4</p> <p><i>This is the last straw! You know I detest bagpipes! The place has now become something between a menagerie and a madhouse, and a man from the council has just declared it unfit for habitation. At least Mother has been spared this last outrage; they took her away yesterday afternoon in an ambulance to a home for the bewildered. I hope you're satisfied.</i></p>	<p>Jan. 5</p> <p>Sir,</p> <p>Our client, Miss Emily Wilbraham, instructs me to inform you that with the arrival on her premises at 7:30 this morning of the entire percussion section of the London Symphony Orchestra, and several of their friends, she has no course left open to her but to seek an injunction to prevent you importuning her further. I am making arrangements for the return of much assorted livestock.</p> <p>I am, Sir, yours faithfully,</p> <p>G. Creep</p> <p>Solicitor</p>
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