

A CHRISTMAS HARBINGER.

There's a Christmas indication, Known to every married male; There's a Christmas intimation That is never known to fail.

THE LEADING MAN.

A CHRISTMAS STORY BY ALICE E. IVES.

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A Christmas tree!

"Yes, and you must come to it."

"Thank you—I!"

"Oh, but you must! The whole company are to be there, and every one is to have a present, if it's only a box of tooth-picks."

"I hope your play will be a 'hit,'"

laughed the new leading man; "but, really, I've lots of letters to write!"

"On Christmas night!" cried the sous-brette, with her hand to her forehead.

"Yes, Christmas is no more to me than any other day. You really must excuse me, Susie." And the leading man's face became a bit hard as he turned away.

"So his high and mightiness won't come. I thought so," said the heavy woman.

"No," said the sous-brette, slightly crest-fallen.

"It was the day before Christmas, and 'The Great Gold Mine' company were all on the stage for rehearsal. How they hated



"WELL, THERE ARE ALWAYS TWO SIDES TO A STORY."

It was on the day of all others when they wanted to be free! But the leading man had quarreled with the stage manager and left suddenly, and rehearsals had to be called for the next day.

Do you know what Christmas means in a traveling theatrical company, you who on that blessed day can sit safely housed under your own roof-tree, beside your own fires and beneath your own spray of holly, where the one you love can call to you a merry Christmas and the eyes that love you can look into yours?

Have you thought how those wanderers who find themselves 1,000 miles from home, husband, wife, sister, mother or the babies at Yuletide may perhaps flick off a tear or two while putting on the grease paint?

At "The Great Gold Mine" rehearsal the heavy woman rushed in from the express office after sending a box of dolls and toys to her youngest, and the low comedian, who was a very vulgar person every night, looked tenderly at a sample of black silk from the gown for mother. Others talked in a jolly spirit of comradeship about the Christmas tree. Susie Sunly pondered a little over the new leading man's refusal to join them.

"He's too big," went on Mrs. Cowles.

"He always wanted the earth. I wonder we got him. Well, I've no patience with a man who will treat his wife as he did. It's a shame! Jennie Draco was as nice a girl as ever lived, and to think of his leaving her for that Blanche Kendrick! Poor Jennie! She just about worshipped him. I thought they were too happy to have it last. Oh, these men!"

"Well, there are always two sides to a story," said the sous-brette, "and I happen to know something of the other side. His wife was that jealous of him she just made a small sized ladies and carried it around with her. I know she thought her eyes of him, but she didn't go the right way to show it."

"I guess he gave her cause enough to be jealous."

"Not at first he didn't. But you know he's a handsome, fascinating fellow, whom women have always been good to, and he can't help doing the agreeable to save his life. I've heard her nag him even in the wings if he stopped to chat with one of the ladies."

"Now, Sue, you know it went beyond innocent chats."

"I'm not saying it didn't in the end. I was in the same company, and I saw the whole thing."

"You did?"

"Yes, Blanche Kendrick was doing the leads, and one night I heard Jennie going for him in the dressing room about her."

"He stood it very quietly for a time. Then he blazed out: 'See here, Jennie, I've borne your senseless jealousy about long enough. I've told you you had no real cause. But, by Jove, I'll give you one now, so that you may know what the real article is like.'"

"The brute!" broke in Mrs. Cowles.

"Yes, it was rather brutal, but it was pretty natural, too, and I don't know that I blamed him much."

"Well, that night Forrest Burrows took Kendrick out to supper and didn't ask his wife."

"Two or three of us were on to the fringes and were watching out for the climax. It came bright and early the next morning. Jennie went to the manager—oh, she was a determined little thing!—and she told him if he didn't give Kendrick notice she would leave and take her husband with her."

"Poor Barry, the manager, was in a bad fix. But Jennie was just playing small parts, and they could spare her a great deal better than they could Blanche Kendrick."

"The husky!"

"Yes, she wasn't any too good, but she was a great 'looker,' and she could act."

"I was on the stage when Barry called Burrows aside to speak with him. I heard Burrows say: 'Why, I haven't the least idea of leaving. As for my wife, that's only a little fit of jealousy. It'll blow over.'"

"It didn't blow over, though. In one week from that time Jennie left and went home alone. I think Burrows never imagined she'd do it, for he came near going to pieces in the first act after he found she had gone. I believe at first he thought of going after her. But you know what throwing up an engagement in the middle of the season means, and after that Blanche Kendrick just wound herself around him. She knew how to do it."

"Did Jennie get a divorce?"

"I don't know. Wasn't there a child?"

"Seems to me I heard so, but I'm not sure. Anyway poor Jennie has been having hard lines."

"Burrows was ill for nearly a year and couldn't work. I suppose he couldn't do much for her."

"I dare say he gives it all to the Kendrick."

"Oh, no; that was off long ago. Do you know the way he spoke a few minutes ago about Christmas? It seemed to me he was thinking of his wife."

"More likely of the new part," sniffed the heavy woman.

"First act!" shouted the stage manager, and the sous-brette made a dash for her entrance.

Things seemed bound to go crisscross in "The Great Gold Mine" company. That very day Paquita, "the child wonder," who played the infant role, was taken with the measles, and a new child had to be speedily secured.

She was rather a pretty little thing, with large, blue eyes and curly, golden hair, but as she was not yet 4 years old the manager feared she was too young, but the woman who brought her assured him she was very clever and would soon learn the two or three lines she was to speak.

"Great Caesar! A new kid, too!" sighed the leading man. "She'll be afraid of me, and the audience will think I've kidnapped her instead of being her lawful parent. I must try to cultivate her."

"Come here, midget," he said kindly.

"I'm not midget. I'm Little Pearl," answered the mite, with great dignity.

"That's a very nice name." And he put out his arms to her.

She hesitated. "I don't think I like you," she said doubtfully.

"Dear me! Why don't you like me?"

"You're too handsome."

There was a chorus of laughter at Burrows' expense.

"That's the first time my fatal beauty ever proved to be a drawback in the profession," laughed Burrows.

"My mamma said I was not to like handsome men," said the child gravely.

"Mamma has evidently had a history," added Burrows in an aside voice. "But," he went on, determined to conciliate the child, "I am your papa, you know. You must be good to me anyway."

"Oh, are you really my papa? Then mamma won't mind if I kiss you." And the tot suddenly flung her chubby arms around the leading man's neck and put her little cherry lips up to his.

The situation was, to say the least, embarrassing. Titters were heard in various directions, and a smothered guffaw exploded in the wings.

"Oh, I mean I am your papa in the play! We are just making believe," hastily corrected the actor.

"The little one drew away from him, and the childish lips quivered.

"Oh, I thought you were my really, truly papa!" she said, with a strangely pathetic look in the big blue eyes.

"Didn't you ever see your papa?"

"No, never."

"Is he dead?"

"I don't know. Mamma cried when I asked her."

"I hope he was good."

"Oh, he was! My mamma said so."

"Then he must be dead," said the leading man in a decided tone. "The good men are all dead. It always proves fatal. I'm quite bad, you know."

"I don't think you're bad," gravely shaking her head.

"Bless you! That's comforting—to have some one have faith in you. I mean I'm bad in the play, not always. You will like me, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, if mamma lets me."

A trumpet being thus arranged, the rehearsal proceeded. That night the leading man made a hit, and Little Pearl acquitted herself with credit. When she came to the line, "Papa, won't you kiss mamma?" she got a round of applause. But there was something wrong with Burrows. He stopped suddenly, as though he had seen a ghost, in the wings, faltered in his speech and was only saved by the leading woman throwing him his line. In two minutes the curtain was down and them.

"DIDN'T YOU EVER SEE YOUR PAPA?"

the people had scattered to their rooms. But Burrows still held the child's hand. He led her to some one who was waiting for her. She was a pale, thin little woman in shabby clothes.

"Jennie," he cried, "are you ill?"

The woman became a shade paler and caught at the young set beside her.

"Come," she said to the child, "come, Edith."

"Edith! My God, my own child, and I didn't know it!"

He caught the little one to his heart, almost crushing her in his strong arms.

"Give her to me," said the woman, with a sort of fierceness. "It is time for her to go home."

"Won't you let me see her just a moment? Am I not her father?"

"Oh," cried the little one gleefully, "are you really and truly my papa? Then why don't you kiss mamma too?"

"If she would let me. Tell her, Edith, I would like to very much, and I would like to go home with her and stay with her and her and!"

"Well," broke in the child, "why don't you kiss her?"

The leading man still held the child

highly in his arms. He looked appealingly at the small woman, who had not changed her position.

"Jennie," he said, "it is Christmas eve, a time to forgive and forget. I want the old times back. For the child's sake, can you?"

Somehow he couldn't get any further, for Jennie was sobbing on his breast, and Edith was reiterating her request for him to kiss her, and he was obeying her commands quite to the letter.

The little child had led them. And that night the leading man had a Christmas tree of his own.

THE ISLAND KINGDOM.

Religious and Social Christmas Customs In Japan.

It may seem to us Americans with our preconceived notions that it is hardly worth while to celebrate a Christmas without the blazing Yule log, or the Christmas tree, or misdeeds and bery, one and all of the accompaniments of that season that have become a part and parcel of our bringing up. Yet the majority of the 87,000 Christianized natives of the Island Kingdom, in their artless, Japanese way, find pleasure enough in observing the day in a manner that would make us think that the seasons had been turned by the sun, and our civilization along with them.

The Japs work all day Christmas, because that is their busiest time of year. It is the season when trade is the most active and the export traffic at its height. Church-going and holiday making are therefore deferred until evening. In the meantime the churches are trimmed by the women and made veritable bowers of flowers, for December in the greater portion of Japan is a genial month, and flowers are so cheap that enough vases loads of blossoms and greenery to trim Barnum's circus tent can be bought for \$10.

All Japanese seem to possess the artistic instinct in a high degree, and the women are no exception. Of course they chat and gossip in a lively fashion, just as our own women do, while their nimble fingers are at work tying and bunching together the camellias, chrysanthemums and roses that are lying around in huge piles. Their ideas of color effects in church decoration are different from ours, and perhaps more correct. Instinctively they seem to realize that white is the emblem of purity and green the color of nature; so white and pale yellow flowers are imposed against backgrounds of solid green leafage, into which are interwoven branches of dwarf orange trees with the ripe, yellow fruit upon them.

After church comes the Christmas dinner, though it is as unlike our own feast as one can well imagine. Turkeys have been introduced into Japan from this country, and the goose they have had with them always. But chicken and duck are the poultry delicacies held in highest esteem, though fish in various forms is served as the first course is drunk from handsomely lacquered bowls, and the rice wine that is drunk with all of the courses loses nothing of its flavor from being served in dainty porcelain cups.

The Japanese family concludes its observance of Christmas day by giving the children a frolic while their elders look on sedately. If the Japanese Christians crowd their merry-making and religious ceremonies into a shorter space of time than we do, they nevertheless appear to enjoy themselves quite as much, and it may be that we can take a leaf out of their book with both pleasure and profit.

E. W. POTTER.

A Christmas Carol.

The frost gleams white on the house tops high.

And the clouds, they look like snow—

And the plumber man goes chirping by—

Blow, little tin horns, blow!

And I view my cash with a secret sigh,

And I say to my soul, "Go slow!"

But the children come, and I can't look glum—

Blow, little tin horns, blow!

So I'm quite resigned to the rocket's noise—

And the roman candle show;

It's hands all around with the girls and boys—

Blow, little tin horns, blow!

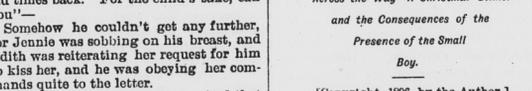
—Atlanta Constitution.



A CUBAN CHRISTMAS.

The Philandering, the Feasting and the Wedding. The Padre and His Pretty Sister—The Senorita Across the Way—A Christmas Dinner and the Consequences of the Presence of the Small Boy.

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THE hut was a little one, with a mud floor and a roof of 'ragua,' or palm spathes, and the hens, the cats, the dogs and the pigs rambled around and through it at their own sweet will. But it was the best shelter the priest could offer me, his own house being full, and I was certain that if it had been a palace, with marble walls and ceilings of gold, I should have been just as welcome, for I had come to the hill of Santo Cerro with a letter of introduction from the president of the district and had the sanction of authority behind me. This, however, was not necessary, for the padre himself was of the hospitable sort and would have given me all he had merely because I was a stranger and an American.

He lived in the hut adjoining, with an aged mother and remarkably pretty sister as housekeepers, the only white people in the little hamlet, all the rest being more or less marked by a "dab of the tar brush."

His education had been obtained in Spain in a Spanish university, and he was well informed and intelligent. He was about 25 years old, and his beautiful sister had not monopolized all the good looks of the family. It was owing to this "fatal gift of beauty," I was told, that he was to be banished in this secluded spot, having been banished here for two years as penance for allowing susceptible young ladies to fall in love with him. It wasn't his fault, I'm sure, for he was a model of propriety and piety. He rose at dawn and ministered at early mass; he visited faithfully the sick and the dying; he won the love of all, old and young. If perchance some foolish young woman chose to bestow upon him her untired affections, lacking opportunity for reciprocal love among the ladies, whose business was it? At least, this is the way the sacristan expressed it, and it would not become me to dissent.

I was assigned a seat at the padre's table right opposite his pretty sister and feasted upon the best fruits of Santo Cerro's gardens. During my leisure I monopolized the company of the fair senorita as much as possible. I could speak Spanish but haltingly, while she understood not a word of my own tongue. This gave us a good excuse for companionship, and it was availed of to the utmost, so that as the days passed we acquired much information of each other's language and customs.

The glorious hill country of Cuba never looks so beautiful to the eyes of the stranger visiting it as in the winter season when he knows that his own land is covered with snow and ice. Its beauty is enhanced by the contrast. This of itself was an excuse to linger, and thus it was that Christmas found me still a guest of the padre's household. Near the hill on which the hamlet was perched was an ancient ruin, where 400 years ago the Spaniards had built a fort and surrounded it with a town. Long ago, more than 800 years, fort and village had been destroyed by earthquakes, but their remains offered a fair field for investigation. This was my pretense for lingering, and in support of it I kept a force of laborers excavating the ruins. Now and then they brought me gold and silver images, bits of pottery that had once adorned old time kitchens and antique coins. But I knew well enough that most of their time was spent in their grass hammocks swung under the silk cottons and that precious little digging they did unless their spades announced my coming down from the hill. Then there was great activity, and the old forest surrounded ruins became the scene of lively labors. But as they exacted a price quite content so long as I did not hurry them, I cannot say that we were not mutually satisfied.

Christmas morning opened clear and cool. The air was sweet, laden with heavy odors of fraigipani and magnolia, and the clouds in the trees were tuning their winged instruments promontory to a heart song at midday. I walked to the chapel on the brow of the hill and was reveling in the magnificent scene spread out below when the priest came out and warmly greeted me. There would be a special service at noon he informed me, but in the afternoon we would take a little "paseo." One of his parishioners, the owner of a rancho, had invited him and his household—including, of course, his guest—to come over and join him in an old-fashioned san-cocho. "And you must go, my friend, for there you will obtain a glimpse of some queer Cuban customs."

I thanked him for the invitation and then asked: "But what is a san-cocho? I have never seen the word in the dictionary."

"True," he answered, with a twinkle in his eye. "The word isn't in the dictionary, but—well, no matter. I will not explain. You shall go with us and see for yourself. Do not linger too long at the ruins today. In fact, I am of opinion that your labors will not even do their daily task, since this is Christmas day, you know."

"You are right," rejoined. "Of course they will not work today. Then, with your permission, I will return to the house and assist the ladies at their preparations."

"Go, my son," he said, with a wave of his white hands as in benediction, "and may God guard thee. I have my duties in the chapel, after performing which I will join you."

Early in the afternoon two solemn visaged donkeys were brought to the door of the padre's hut, having on their backs enormous saddles of straw, which overhung them as the eaves of a thatched cottage overhang the walls. Upon these sat two sanctimonious animals were soon mounted Senorita Laurita, the sister of the priest, and Senorita Valdemiras, the young lady from across the way. As they left the door two fiery steeds were brought up, upon whose backs the priest and myself vaulted airily and then darted after the donkeys. These we soon overtook, and, by a very natural arrangement, dropped alongside the ladies. Valdemiras was dark of skin, but a perfect odalisque for beauty, with raven tresses and flashing black orbs, like liquid fire, except that they were perpetually melting into dewy languorousness—in their depths such passions slumbering! Ah, if the good bishops who bar the white tresses and dab a fresh coat of powder on their cheeks, the padre and I wondered about the premises. The house consisted of the ordinary "bohio," or native hut of split palm logs, covered with bark. There were three rooms, all on the ground floor, which was of clay. The three rooms were open at the top, clear to the sky, the partitions separating them, the central one being used for living and reception room and the side ones for sleeping apartments.

Soon we were invited in to partake of the san-cocho, which, as it was already on the table, I found to be a sort of olla podrida, something similar to the West Indian pepper pot, which is composed of everything that grows beneath the sun and a portion of earth, all thrown into one earthen receptacle and stewed or seethed together. This is called a "san-cocho" and is a favorite dish in the country districts—a kind of hodgepodge of a stew, with bits of pork and chicken particularly prominent.

Around the steaming vessel of san-cocho, then, a hungry party of us were seated at the growing board, which was covered with a tablecloth heavily embroidered. The padre invoked divine blessing. Our host, his wife and daughter helped us lavishly, and, moreover, every guest helped himself and with his fingers. It was, I soon perceived, considered the height of hospitality to pick one's choice morsel with your fingers and hand it to the neighbor with your neighbor's plate. I found, as I explored the contents of the vast earthen pot, a wishbone, which I had the pleasure of dividing with Laurita. I secured the longer half, at which there were much exclaiming and demanding of what I had wished for. At first I would not satisfy their curiosity, but when Laurita herself insisted that I should I proclaimed that my wish had something to do with her. Then there was renewed excitement and a general demand that the wish should be gratified and that I should tell them at once what it was. Laurita must have divined it, for she was silent and cast down her eyes, only darting at me one pleading glance. At last, in response to the universal request, I declared that if the senorita would promise to grant my wish I would not insist upon it then, at which there was another outburst of remonstrance.

The san-cocho was finally finished, but that was not all of the feast, for after the table was cleared our sturdy host excused himself for a moment, while all present looked expectantly in the direction of the "horno." And there was a grand outburst of applause when our host reappeared bearing proudly aloft that same little porker, former occupant of the oven, looking so cheerful and grinning so complacently that we fully expected him to speak with satisfaction. And, as for his complexion, it was so brown and crisp that everybody there was wishing to taste it at once. He almost fell to pieces when they pointed their fingers at him, and several fingers were pointed at him in less time than it takes to mention it, and he was soon shredded into delicious flakes and my plate again loaded with friendly offerings. Our host brought out a cask of homemade wine, and we pledged each other in the juice of the Cuban grape.

Cornhusk cigarettes and real Cuban cigars were next passed around, to which the ladies not only did not object, but themselves assisted in depleting the abundant supply. And as the smoke wreaths of the fragrant weed were curling around the rafters overhead and losing themselves among the thatch the host arose and made an announcement that was received with applause. He had, he said, a son, an only muchacho bueno, "who was then 'cooking una gallina,' literally 'eating a pullet.' This term in Cuban parlance meant that the young man was much en-

amored of a brown skinned beauty to whom he was paying honest court. They were commended to stand up and take the floor, which they promptly did, a brick red blush mantling the cheek of each young culprit. Then, at a signal, which doubtless had been prearranged, Laurita and Valdemiras supported the bride to be on one side, while I was requested to make one of a male couple to preserve the balance on the other. The service was short, but impressive, and the young couple, with grave faces, soon received the congratulations of their friends. The ceremony was followed by a dance; this in turn gave way to another feast, and it was well into the night when we mounted our beasts and ambled toward the rectory.

Our pathway was faintly illumined by the last quarter of the moon, and when we had arrived at the hamlet and the animals had been sent to their pasturage it was proposed to stroll over to the chapel and look at the valley by moonlight. I was the one to propose it, of course, for I doubt if it had ever entered the head of any one of my friends to do such a romantic thing as to go out of his way for a view either by moonlight or sunlight. There was a consultation, the pretty sister seeming astonished at my temerity, but Valdemiras came to the rescue—she was a woman of remarkable sense—and decided for the stroll. "Of course," I heard her argue, "it is the custom for the stranger to walk at night with his female friends when he is at home, we should do as he wishes. And then your mother will be with us, and the mother will not object."

This decided the matter, and, though in a flutter of mingled dread and delight, Laurita consented. As for the padre, he

was a good man, with a heart full of the milk of human kindness, and so he merely tucked the arm of the astute Valdemiras within his own and led the way to the chapel steps. He sought out a seat on the shady side of the chapel, where we could overlook the valley, and promptly gave his attention to the view and to the companion at his side. This very sensible arrangement left the pretty sister to be entertained by me and the moon. And as I was a comparative stranger, and as she had not probably in all the 19 years of her innocent existence given the lunar orb more than a passing thought, the situation seemed to her novel in the extreme. Well, lunar observations are sometimes pleasant, though practically profitless. Like the man in the moon, their charms are purely imaginative. The spirit of mischief suggested that this might be the opportunity of which I had not availed at the "bohio." I in turn suggested the same to Laurita, but she was sure—quite sure—it was not. And yet she did not withdraw her hand, which lay so temptingly within my reach. She did not object when I reached around her and arranged the mantilla which had fallen from her shoulders. I was younger than she at this present writing. I was younger—my blood raced unimpeded through my veins. Looking vaguely beyond and over her shoulder, I saw just then a small boy comfortably curled up against the chapel wall.

I was shocked, perhaps indignant for it then flashed upon me that the small boy had been sent to watch us. But I managed to say, though with an effort: "Do you know, I admire your brother so! He realizes to me the Scriptural injunction to be harmless as the dove."

"Yes," she rejoined, noting the intrusive object and a faint smile, in which amusement and regret were strangely blended, hovering around her lips, "and do you know I sometimes think he has heeded that other injunction to be wise as the serpent."

Perhaps it might not have ended that way were it not for the above said watchful small boy. At all events, Valdemiras was led to the altar to her husband, but hand it with a flourish in your neighbor's plate. I found, as I explored the contents of the vast earthen pot, a wishbone, which I had the pleasure of dividing with Laurita. I secured the longer half, at which there were much exclaiming and demanding of what I had wished for. At first I would not satisfy their curiosity, but when Laurita herself insisted that I should I proclaimed that my wish had something to do with her. Then there was renewed excitement and a general demand that the wish should be gratified and that I should tell them at once what it was. Laurita must have divined it, for she was silent and cast down her eyes, only darting at me one pleading glance. At last, in response to the universal request, I declared that if the senorita would promise to grant my wish I would not insist upon it then, at which there was another outburst of remonstrance.

Philosophy of Giving.

The man who starts out by presents does not stop to count the cost or inspect the quality of the articles profusely exposed to his fancy. Everything goes, as the saying is, and he crams his pockets with a miscellaneous assortment of things for which he pays two or three times as much as they are worth, when they are worth anything, and which nothing could induce him to purchase, or hardly to carry home without expense at any other time of the year.

This is not the highest expression of the meaning of Christmas, but it is authentic and salutary as far as it goes. It is in harmony with the spirit of the festival, and its efforts tend to keep alive those feelings and inspirations which are the mainstay of society and the basis of morality and religion. So long as the germs remain there is sure to be growth and product.

A Strong Reminder.

Oldsack—I want to give the dear girl something that will strongly remind her of me whenever she sees it.

Cynicus—Then give her a pocket flask.

THE SENORITA ACROSS THE WAY.

was a good man, with a heart full of the milk of human kindness, and so he merely tucked the arm of the astute Valdemiras within his own and led the way to the chapel steps. He sought out a seat on the shady side of the chapel, where we could overlook the valley, and promptly gave his attention to the view and to the companion at his side. This very sensible arrangement left the pretty sister to be entertained by me and the moon. And as I was a comparative stranger, and as she had not probably in all the 19 years of her innocent existence given the lunar orb more than a passing thought, the situation seemed to her novel in the extreme. Well, lunar observations are sometimes pleasant, though practically profitless. Like the man in the moon, their charms are purely imaginative. The spirit of mischief suggested that this might be the opportunity of which I had not availed at the "bohio." I in turn suggested the same to Laurita, but she was sure—quite sure—it was not. And yet she did not withdraw her hand, which lay so temptingly within my reach. She did not object when I reached around her and arranged the mantilla which had fallen from her shoulders. I was younger than she at this present writing. I was younger—my blood raced unimpeded through my veins. Looking vaguely beyond and over her shoulder, I saw just then a small boy comfortably curled up against the chapel wall.

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