



### CHRISTMAS ANGELS AND BELLS

It came upon the midnight clear,  
That glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth  
To touch their harps of gold;  
Peace on the earth, good-will to men,  
From heaven's all gracious King;  
The world in solemn stillness lay  
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,  
With peaceful wings unfurled;  
And still their heavenly music floats  
O'er all the weary world;  
Above its sad and lonely plains  
They bend on hovering wing,  
And ever o'er its babel sounds  
The blessed angels sing.

O ye, beneath life's crushing load,  
Whose forms are bending low,  
Who toil along the climbing way  
With painful steps and slow!  
Look now, for glad and golden hours  
Come swiftly on the wing:  
Oh, rest beside the weary road,  
And hear the angels sing.

### THE MARVELOUS NIGHT

The house had a pinched, aristocratic air; it leaned back, as though holding its nose against the odors which in its youth doubtless had arisen from the dark, narrow street. The street now, though, was smooth and clean; it had been so for many years; and tonight its noisy and colored vivacity had given way to the clam beauty of falling snow.

Elizabeth and Maryan were in their room; already they had on their long, cool night-dresses; side by side, hands behind their backs, their small stomachs prominent, they were following with big blue eyes the movements of Father and Mother. These found and not quite grown-up parents were examining the big fire-place—examining it with an interest beyond even that which they had shown when visiting, to rent this odd house in a queer quarter of old Paris.

"This is pure Renaissance," said Father, passing his hand over the undulant marble.

"And in need of repair, as everything else," said Mother. "I'm glad I've had the furnace put in." She held her slim, white hands over the grating from which breathed a gentle warmth.

"Your are, my dear, the finished product of a New York flat," said Father.

"And you a colored picture out of an old story-book."

Having thus insulted each other, they looked at each other and smiled. Father stepped within the big fire-place.

"It's snowing!" he announced triumphantly as a boy.

But when he came out to prove it, everybody laughed. For the snow upon his face, having passed through soot, was black.

He was excited, and his eyes were bright. "Just step in there, Maud," he cried. "It's the bluest old place. You can see the clouds drive by, and at times a bit of moon, and you feel the snow falling!"

"Thank you," said Mother. "I don't like black snow upon my nose."

"You're an unregenerate Harlemitte!"

Father vanished again within the chimney. When he reappeared, he had a staid expression of one who had returned to a contemplation of serious affairs, and it was Elizabeth and Maryan that he addressed. Their four blue eyes were steady upon him, just about at the height of his waist-line. "Well, this is the place all right," he announced. "You can hang your stockings right here. For surely it is down this chimney he will come."

But the jumping and hand-clapping which he expected, failed to follow his words. Instead, four big blue eyes remained upon him, solemn and immobile. A slight hesitation, like the shadow of a cloud, passed through them. "Taint stockings," lisped Maryan. "It's shoes!"

"Of course, Father," said Elizabeth. "You always think yourself in the United States still! In France, it's shoes."

"Yes, Mr. Sharon," chimed Mother, glad to regain the advantage. "In France, we don't hang stockings before the fireplace. In France, we place our shoes before the hearth on Christmas eve."

"Oh, very well!" said Father cheerfully. "Shoes it is! They don't hold as much as stockings, anyway. But I should advise you to put them right here, before this fire-place. It is surely down this chimney that Santa Claus will come."

"But the four big eyes remained just where they were, across their azure there fled again a slight haze of doubt. "But 't ain't Santa Claus!" exclaimed Maryan, taking a deep breath.

"No father. You see, you know very little about such things," said Elizabeth indulgently. "Elsie told us. In France, it's the little Jesus come down and puts toys."

"The little Jesus!"

"Yes, Mr. Sharon," said Mother, taking a smiling part in Father's discomfort. "In France, it is not Santa Claus at all; it is the little Jesus, the infant Christ himself, who comes down the chimney Christmas night."

"To fill the stockings!"

"To fill the shoes, Mr. Sharon."

"Oh, very well, very well!" said Father, still cheerful. But he put his hands to his head, being all mix-

ed up over those international complications.

"We saw him once," said Maryan dreamily.

"You saw him!" cried Mother.

"Yes," said Elizabeth. "Don't you remember? You took us."

"Oh—his picture—at the Louvre!"

"With his mamma. He was all smooth and naked. And he had brown eyes, but golden hair."

"Yeth," said Maryan. "His hairs were gold."

Father pounced upon Maryan, whisked her up aloft, and with one mighty heave threw her through the air, clear across the room, to the eider-down comforter upon the bed. Instantly, he seized Elizabeth and sent her sprawling after.

They lit in a tangle of giggles and legs. "Time to go to bed!" he roared in a terrible voice.

"Oh, Frank," said Mother. And going to the bed, she laid the children in it right. "Now you must go to sleep, quick, quick, so the petit Jesus won't get scared, and turn back, and forget you."

"Good-night," said Elizabeth, pushing her lips out for a kiss.

"Good-night," said Maryan, reaching upward with pink arms.

"Good-night," said Mother, kissing.

"Good-night," said Father, kissing. The light went out; the door closed softly.

In the hall, Father and Mother stopped a moment, groping for each other in the darkness. Mother put both her hands on his shoulders, and her brow against his chest. "Oh, Frank," she whispered, "if Harold were only still here—poor Harold!"

Father placed one arm about her; his other hand went down into a pocket for a handkerchief, for he suddenly realized that he had a cold in the head.

"He would be ten years old now, Frank. Ten!"

"He's an angel, I guess," said Father.

They pressed up close and, side by side, went down the corridor.

The night, in the children's room, was silent for perhaps five minutes—five minutes that seemed much longer than five minutes. Then there came a strange, small sound. It was like the vibration of an electric bell; but less precise, less metallic and more gentle; like the faint hesitant burr of a new-born electric bell, muffled beneath eider-down quilts.

Almost immediately, there arose another. Another ringing, also muffled, hesitant and soft; but with a lower note, more mellow and more gray.

"T-t-r-r-r-ee-hee-hee," went the first little bell.

"Th-th-r-r-roo-hee-hoo-hoo," went the second more mellow little bell.

"Tree-hee, thro-hoo; tree-hee-hee, throo-hoo," they now went, both together.

Then the second little bell became a little human voice. "They that we are asleep, said the first little bell, also still under the blankets.

"Tr-r-ee-hee-hee-hee, th-r-roo-hoo-hoo." This time the sound was clear.

The blankets had been thrown off. But if the blankets were off, the night remained. "It's awful dark," said one of the voices.

"I got the candle all ready," said the other. "It's in the lowest drawer, under the towels, where we can find it."

"Then light it."

"It is awful dark, isn't it?"

"Light it!" repeated the littlest voice; and there was a movement, as of some impatient elbow nudging a sensitive rib.

A body slid down the side of the bed, bare feet thumped to the floor; there was a fumbling within the dresser, the crackle of a match. Upon the night-table a light glowed, lighting Elizabeth's head, throwing gold upon gold.

"Now, come back to bed, quick!" called Maryan. She never liked to be left alone in bed.

Elizabeth leaped back, knelt, facing her pillow, and raised it till it stood up straight against the back of the bed. Then, with an adroit movement, without letting it fall down, she turned and sat up against it.

Maryan tried to imitate her sister. But her knees not being sharp like Elizabeth's, but round, she slipped and went head-first into the pillow, while the lower part of her rose in the attitude of a tumble-bug. With help though, she righted herself and, panting, achieved Elizabeth's position. The little girls now sat upright in bed, side by side. The expression on their faces was that of a kitten which had just lapped cream. They looked at each other, and sniggered. Then their eyes turned to the big-fire place and remained there. Maryan's left hand slid along the counterpane; Elizabeth's right slid through it; they met and clasped.

"Do you think he'll come?" asked Maryan, after a while.

"Of course. Isn't it Christmas, and aren't the shoes all ready?"

"Will he be pretty and soft, like in the picture?"

"Of course."

"But how will he come?"

"Down the chimney."

"But how down the chimney?"

"Down the chimney; how do you suppose?"

"In a sleigh?"

"No-o; that's old Santa Claus does that."

"Then how?"

"Oh, he'll come all right!"

Silence. They stared solemnly at the fire-place. But Maryan was not good at waiting.

"Will his mamma be with him?"

"No, goosie."

"Why?"

"Well, he has to have his breakfast when he gets back, doesn't he? Who'd have his breakfast ready, if his mamma wasn't there!"

"Then she stays home?"

"Yes."

"In heaven?"

"Of course."

"But Lisbeth, how does he come?"

"Oh, Maryan, I told you already!"

"Will he fly down?"

"Maybe."

"He's got little wings, hasn't he?"

"No, goosie. That's Cupid. And the little angels what's got only heads."

"Then how?"

"Oh, Maryan, you make me nervous!"

"But he's got an aeroplane. A little toy aeroplane what buzzes."

"Ain't that cute!"

"Yes, but you mustn't talk any more. Else he won't come at all, at all."

"I'll keep still."

They were silent, looking steadily at the fire-place. Before them, on the white counterpane, their hands lay clasped; above, their yellow curls mingled.

A strange thing began to happen. The fireplace began to glow away. It would go away, then suddenly come back; go away and come back, go away and come back. Finally, it went away, without coming back.

The big blue eyes saw nothing now. And seeing nothing, very sensibly they closed.

Between the golden heads, a crack slowly appeared. It grew. One small head was sliding to the left, the other small head was slipping to the right. The separation quickened; there was a sudden divergent knock; two white-robed little bodies sprawled across the bed, like two dolls who should have fought to a mutual knockout.

The candle spluttered. Its small flame went up and down, as though it were winking.

It was thus that Father and Mother found the room an hour later. Father entered first. He said: "The little devils! Look! The lit-tle dev-ils!"

"Did you ever?" said Mother.

"A candle," growled Father, pointing to the taper, which had quickly assumed at their entrance an expression of having seen nothing.

"That's Miss Elizabeth!" said Mother.

Father took Maryan by the leg, and drew her down to her right place in bed. With Elizabeth, who was not so chubby, and hence slept less soundly, more precaution had to be taken; but at last they were both sleeping in position, the covers up to their chins.

"Put now?" asked Father.

"Put out the light; it will be safer."

The candle was blown out, and also the lamp. Then, in the dark, Father and Mother worked mysteriously. They went out and came in; they fumbled about the hearth. Their steps were a tip-toe; their words were murmurs. But, in the obscurity and the silence, several times there were odd disturbances.

A bu-a-a of baby sheep; a queer, flat voice saying, "pa-pa, ma-ma; an abrupt whirr as of a clock running down, and a sweet jangle of little bells. At each accident, Father and Mother were petrified for several moments into complete immobility.

Finally, the door was closed, and they were again alone in the desert hall-way. And again, as if feeling lonely there, Mother threw herself upon Father's sturdy frame. "Oh, Frank," she said, "if little Harold were only here!"

"Yes, dear, yes, dear," said Father, petting her.

"He'd be ten years old now, Ten!"

"He's an angel," said Father.

And holding each other close, they went on down the hall. A light flared, a door shut; a silence that seemed definite flowed slowly through the house.

Above, upon the roof, the snow was coming down steadily in large, humid flakes; here and there it melted, leaving small spots that glistened vaguely. The clouds were very low; they seemed almost within the reach of an upraised hand. They passed swiftly, sulphur-hued, and tearing at times, gave a rapid glimpse of a hurrying moon, tenuous as a volute of green vapor.

To the right and the left, other roofs stretched, covered with white; spots of melted snow looked like pools. And myriads of chimneys some high, some low, some round, glistened vaguely. The clouds were a fantastic and gesticulating forest of small, mad, twigless trees.

Along this artificial sierra, through the stiff and stunted landscape, two human forms came gliding from the south. They slid, they crawled, they leaped, they made sudden shadowy rushes; they sprang across chasms like flying squirrels, and lit on all-fours as on padded paws, their bodies tight as rubber-balls.

The leader was a man. The vizor of his cap was pulled down even with his brow; rope sandals were on his feet; and within his closely buttoned jacket, his squat body had a feline and disquieting resiliency. A

red handkerchief, knotted about his neck, made him sinister. His movements were precise and unerring, and his eyes were sharp and quick as a ferret's.

The second was a small boy, thin as a gutter-cat. He followed the man closely, leaping as he leaped, crawling as he crawled, placing his right hand here, his knee there, imitating each gesture with a fidelity that gave him the appearance of one of those touching little monkeys one sees at a circus, secretly tied to their crafty trainer by an invisible and inexorable chain. Twice, though, he stopped suddenly and clung convulsively with elbows, feet and nails, while his eyes, going wild, plunged along the precipitous slope beneath him. The first time, a sharp ejaculation of his leader sufficed to start him on again. The second time, the leader's hand came down upon his shoulder with a heavy, pinching grip.

They were at length upon the slate roof beneath which Elizabeth and Maryan were sleeping. They made for the rectangular masonry of the big chimney and stood up against it. The man's eyes were just even with its top.

"This is the place," he said. His voice had no resonance. "That's the flue down which you go."

The boy shrunk small. He was a thin little boy, and the wrist of the arm he held against the chimney was red and crevassed with cold.

"Tighten your belt," said the man.

The boy had a broad belt about his waist; sewed to it was a metal ring. He tightened the belt; then his eyes went up toward the man.

In the raised chin and the cover of the shoulders, there was once more the expression of the little circus monkey afraid of its trainer.

The man was unwinding from his own waist a rope. He tied one end of it to the ring in the boy's belt. An agitation, which up to this time the boy had successfully repressed, now burst out into speech. "Oh, master," he pleaded, "not tonight, not tonight!"

The man went on looping in his right hand the loose extremity of the rope.

"Please, master. This time I am afraid. All day I have been afraid. There is something wrong. Something will happen."

"You go down the near flue," said the man calmly, and as though he had not heard the boy. "That takes you into the nursery. I drew it for you at the cabaret. Nothing there. The door is to the left. It takes you into the hall-way. You follow that to the bottom. Just before it turns to the right, there is a door to the left. That's your door. Go in. The man's clothes will be on a chair, or somewhere about. Get his wallet. Then take one look at the woman's dressing table. Light a match—just one—for that. Grab everything that shines. That's all tonight. The wallet and what's on the dressing table. You can do it all in ten minutes."

"Master, master, I've not eaten! I'm faint!"

"Work on your knees, remember. All the time on your knees. Get up just once—at the dressing table. All of the rest of the time, keep on your knees."

"Master, I'm afraid tonight! Master—"

"Remember. The man's wallet, the jewels on the dressing table. First door to the left, then down the corridor, then again the door to the left. And on your knees!"

"Master, I beseech you—not tonight, not tonight! Master, I beseech you—please—"

In the neighborhood, a big bell struck. A wave of golden sound went flowing through the night, wheeling the man and the boy. The bell struck again, and the boy, as if attuned in harmony, began to tremble to the deep vibration. Once, twice, the bell rang; three times, twelve times, and was still, leaving a hum in the air. The boy crossed his arms against the masonry, and buried his face in them with a small, choking sob.

The man pounced upon him and gripped him hard. "Remember what I did last time you were thus," he said coldly; "remember."

All resistance crumbled in the boy. "I'm going master," he said. The man hoisted him up; feet first, he vanished down the chimney.

The man, remaining outside held the rope taut as it slid through his hands. At times he threw a rapid glance over the roofs. The rope, slipping, made a scratching sound upon the stone.

Suddenly the man went backward in a half somersault. With an agile twist, he landed upon hands and feet. But he was now on the steeper part of the roof; on hands and knees, he went sliding on, downward toward the edge. His face was contracted; his feet, his hands stamped and clawed.

Finally, he stopped himself, not a foot from the edge.

He remained here a long moment, as though he had lost the courage to attempt a movement; then he began slowly, cautiously, to make his way upward again. When he had reached the chimney, he clung to it like a drunken man.

His face was livid. He took a big breath. Then his eyes fell upon his right hand. Clenched within it, he still held the rope, and the rope was broken.

A new panic seized him instantly. In two springs, he had reached the next roof, and was fitting an acrobatic shadow, through the tangle of chimneys. He disappeared. A minute later, he was down in the street, sliding along the walls with the smooth rapidity of a rat.

Elizabeth was dreaming that she sat in a meadow dotted with daisies, when she heard a rush, as of a fall through the air, and then the shock of a catastrophic landing.

She awoke—so quickly that the fall rang still along her nerves—and then, immediately, did not know where she was. With downward palms, she felt for the grass; there was no grass. She plucked at a

flower; there were no flowers. She was in bed. But something was missing. It was the light! There had been a light, because they had been watching. Watching for what?

Ah, for the little Jesus. All the time, they had been in bed. Then that noise of something coming down? It had been right here. It had been in the chimney. Oh, it had been little Jesus, maybe. He was right here now, then, maybe, right here in the room, in the dark! Elizabeth began to tremble with hope, with ecstasy and with awe.

But a tender body pushed itself against her. She placed her right arm about it. "Did you hear dat?" whispered Maryan. "Oo, did you hear dat?"

"Yes," murmured Elizabeth, her lips into a warm small ear. "Yes."

"It's hum; Oo, maybe it's hum!"

"Sh-sh! Sh-sh!"

Very tense, her eyes making a round effort in the night, Elizabeth listened hard, holding her breath. Against her side, with the movement of a puppy-dog, Maryan had snuggled her small nose. There was not a sound in the room.

Maryan began to speak again, the muffled words tingling along Elizabeth's ribs. "Lisbeth, why don't you make a light; make a light, Lisbeth, make a light!"

"I'm scared," Elizabeth. "I'm scared of scaring something," she corrected.

"But if you make a light, we'll see!" hissed Maryan vehemently.

When Maryan became vehement precautions trembled on the point of being shattered. Without another word, Elizabeth slipped to the floor, while Maryan nestled still closer in the hollow resulting from the big sister's absence. Elizabeth's hands shook a bit; two matches went wrong; then a yellow light streamed through the room, and Elizabeth, turning, followed its invasion with her eyes. "What is it?" called Maryan, her face still buried in the pillow.

But Elizabeth, her hands clutching the opening of her night-dress upon her little chest, could say only: "Oh! Oh!"

"Well, what is it?" Maryan repeated impatiently, but still without opening her eyes. Jack-in-the-box. Her hands went up. "Oh, Maryan, look, look! Toys!"

Maryan rose to her knees, like a kitten, put her hand to her throat, with a gesture like Elizabeth's; her eyes opened wide. "Ooh! Ooh!" she said.

"Come!" said Elizabeth, her feet already beginning to prance. "Come, come!"

She helped Maryan down, and the two children, holding hands, went wondrously toward the fire-place. Before it rose a pyramid of toys. Toys so numerous, so commingled, that the eye could not distinguish them at first. One saw only a wheel here, a diminutive arm thrust out there, an assemblage of new shiny rods and blues, of shimmering and shapes—an uncatalogued heap of pure joy.

"There's a doll," said Maryan, taking a step forward. "A blue dolly with buckled shoes!"

"And a dolly wash-stand," said Elizabeth, advancing a second step. "A sheep, all soft and woolly!"

They took another step.

"A little watering-can for make-believe flowers!" Each step marked a new discovery.

"A tautmobility."

"A doggy what barks!"

"A baby looking-glass; Ooh, a baby looking-glass."

"A watch!"

"A —"

"A —"

They stopped short. "Oh," said Elizabeth, "there's something behind!"

"They's somefin behind!"

"It's a boy!" said Elizabeth.

"It's little Jesus," said Maryan.

They were no longer going forward. Hand in hand, they poised in an attitude of ready fight. Behind the toys—and their eyes now saw not the toys, but only what was behind—behind the toys, in the very interior of the chimney, upon the hearth-stone, a small boy lay coiled, motionless.

"It is little Jesus, ain't it?" gasped Maryan.

"Must be," said Elizabeth. "Must be."

"Let's go back to bed," proposed Maryan.

"No, you goosie; let's look," said Elizabeth.

She was standing very still, looking hard, a small frown upon her forehead. She stepped back, seized the candle; then, light in hand, looked again, her bare toes against the first toys. Maryan, a little behind, clung to her sister's night-dress and shivered a bit.

"He's sleeping," decided Elizabeth. "Yeth, he's thleepin!"

"Isn't he cute!"

"Ain't he thunnin'!"

"The boy coiled there on the hearth did not move. One arm was beneath his head; the other, crossed above it as if warding off a menace, held partly a disorder of brown curls, and the sleeve of this arm, drawn back by the gesture, showed a thin wrist, red and crevassed with cold.

Across the blue wonder of Maryan's eyes, there crept slowly a troubled doubt. "But Lisbeth," she said heavily, "Lisbeth, he's dressed! all dressed!"

"Umph—of course!"

"But Lisbeth, when we saw his picture, he was all nice and pretty and naked!"

"Umph—it wasn't winter then, was it? Do you think he could go down this weather and his mamma not say: 'Here, you little Jesus, don't you dare go out that way! Just put your clothes on, all your clothes on! Do you want to catch your death-o'-cold?'"

"But his clothes is all raggedy and poor!"

"Well, they don't wear clothes much up there; so they don't have new ones, 'cause it's of no use; and when they go out, they put on any old ones will do."

"But Lisbeth, he's all black, all sooty and black!"

"Course! I'd like to see you go down a chimney, missus, and not get black all over!"

"But he ain't got wings. No wings at all!"

"Oh, you're always getting mixed up. It's Cupid has wings; and the little angels with only heads!"

"They remained there, hand in hand, gazing in silence. Maryan was not quite quelled. "Look at his wrist," she whispered, "his little wrist!"