

Song at Twilight

BY LAURA G. SALVERSON

NURSE GREY, busily hanging holly boughs in the small sunroom of the Charity Hospital, kept thinking of Becky. Through days and nights of pain borne with silent fortitude, the little creature had edged into her heart. It was not just her courage; there was something in the child's dark, trusting eyes—something that her frail, clinging fingers tried to communicate—that haunted Nurse Grey. Something indefinable which, she knew instinctively, might turn the scales for Becky if only she could lay hold of it with the force of her will. As it was, the child lay in a kind of misty twilight whence nothing could rouse her to take hold of life.

Obsessed with her small charge Nurse Grey resented the brilliant sunshine and glanced with impatience at the roller canaries that sang in the window. The beauty of the day and all these festive preparations increased her distress and quickened her anxiety. But of course that was foolish of her. The other children were entitled to their Christmas and the lovely weather was a great gift in itself.

Matron entering briskly, a huge fern in her capable hands, smiled at the nurse. "That's very fine; a bit of green gives such a homey touch."

Nurse Grey nodded: "It is pretty. With the tree lighted and the radio broadcast timed so nicely the day should be a success. It was good of Henderson's to give us a special programme."

"It certainly was," Matron agreed. "I was almost ashamed to ask them. They must be deluged with impossible requests. But when I explained that the radio was a Christmas gift and that none of the little patients had heard a broadcast before they responded immediately. I quite expect the radio to work wonders for the children."

"Not all the children," Nurse Grey said bitterly, "the day of miracles is past."

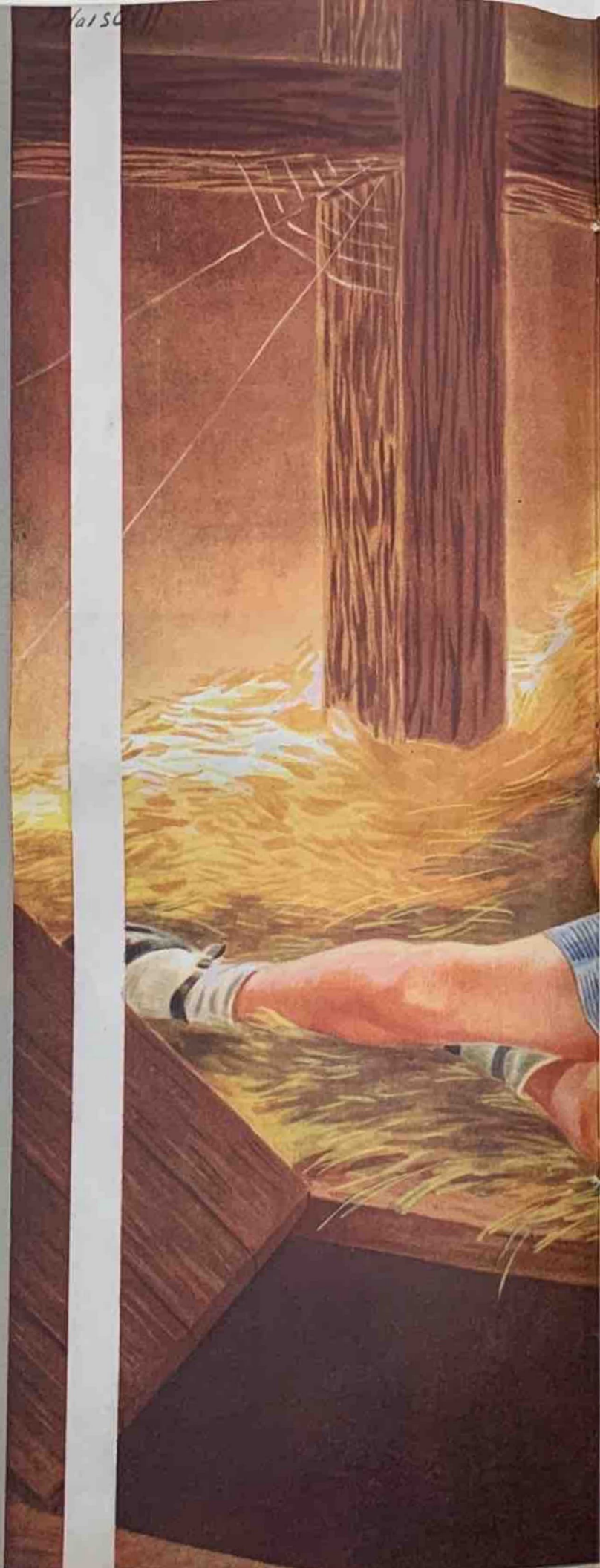
Matron understood and her blunt voice softened a little. "Pull yourself together, nurse. I am older than you in this service, my dear, and I am still inclined to believe in miracles. The human spirit is a strange and wonderful thing."

"I'm sorry, Matron. I didn't mean to be gloomy. But you see it's her pluck. The way Becky has taken everything chin up. If you had been with her through those first dreadful nights you would know what I mean . . . why, I can't bear to think of so much courage ending in defeat—"

"What did Dr. Chalmers say this morning?"
"Nothing! He doesn't know what to make of it. She is free of pain and the bones have knit properly—but she isn't making progress. She doesn't seem to want to get well! That's what frightens me. I keep thinking if only there was some way of reaching down through that dark silence to make her smile even once there might be some hope."

"Well, nurse," Matron resumed her brisk manner, "take comfort from the thought that the child depends on you. Now get yourself

ILLUSTRATED BY ELINORE BLAISDELL





"He was so soft and made a buzzing kind of noise inside himself."

a strong cup of tea and tell Williams to report. She will relieve you of general duty for the rest of the day. Stand by in Number Nine—and use your own judgment."

When Nurse Grey entered Number Nine the room was so unearthly quiet that for a moment her heart froze with fear. The stillness was like an enveloping fog through which one searches blindly for familiar realities and, though the wintry sunlight streamed down from the glistening window, the light was cold and impersonal, like the light in a deserted cathedral where even the ghosts are beyond recall. That was it, Nurse thought, with a catch of pain at her heart, that mysterious something which held Becky imprisoned was slowly and surely drawing her back into the wintry twilight beyond human recall.

Stepping softly, she approached the small white bed and smiled with relief when the child stirred, her tiny hand groping upward.

"I missed you. It's very long, sometimes—being alone."

Nurse Grey was deeply moved. This was the first complaint Becky had ever made, the first faint cry from the hidden self that must so often have wept inwardly. "I know, dear," Nurse said. "But now I've a nice surprise for both of us. Just think! I'm to stay here all afternoon."

The child's enormous eyes fixed upon her with silent gratitude and the tiny bird-like claw clung to her warm fingers. If only she would smile, Nurse thought—come out from behind that tragic, unchildlike mask! To enhearten herself more than Becky, Nurse Grey began to talk in aimless, gentle monotone. It was a beautiful day, not cold, but with fluffy snowflakes drifting down to dress the trees with star dust. The lake in front of the hospital was smooth as glass and clear as a mirror. A lovely day to usher in the holidays. "Becky, dear, did you know it is nearly Christmas?"

For a fractional instant, something like interest stirred the sombre depths of the child's eyes, so the nurse hurried on hopefully:

"Well, it is, dear. And the children who are well enough—as you will soon be well, Becky—" she hesitated, brushing an imaginary speck from her spotless uniform, and went on quickly: "they're so busy making little gifts—such pretty, clever things. You'll be surprised when you see them. But that isn't all. Today Matron and the nurses have been working like beavers fixing up the sunroom with holly and evergreens, for we're to have a concert at four o'clock. A real concert of Christmas music."

Almost as if the sound escaped unwillingly, the child said, "Singing? Oh, that will be wonderful!"

Quickly Nurse Grey seized her opportunity. "Would you like to hear it, Becky? Would you, dear? We could open the door a bit and hear quite well."

The bird-like fingers fluttered convulsively, and the ray of sudden eagerness that illumined the little face was like a beam of warm sunlight.

"Oh, yes—yes! I would, please nurse . . . Once—I heard singing—" the breathless whisper laded on a note of fear, and a nervous tremor passed through the emaciated little frame. Nurse Grey bent swiftly and kissed the beautiful, cold brow under its cloud of soft, dark hair, wondering pityingly what dark memories haunted the child.

"Tell me about it if you like," she encouraged, "no doubt it was very nice singing."

"Oh, yes—" the thin voice whispered. "It was in a church. I went in because I was cold . . . it was when I ran away the first time . . ."

Nurse smoothed her immaculate skirt, pretending not to notice the frightened catch in the child's voice. "So you ran away? Now isn't that funny! When I was a girl I ran away too. I wanted to be a gypsy and wear rings in my ears and play a guitar and never never go to school."

The dark brooding eyes dilated with incredible astonishment. "Oh, nurse! I thought only bad children ran away. The kind that come from orphan homes. The—the kind that have no parents—to speak of."

Nurse Grey wanted to cry out in anger at the evil thing that was taking shape at last—Poor baby! she thought—what monster could have done this to a child . . . "Whoever told you that was stupid, Becky," she said, trying not to sound bitter. "Why, Matron was an orphan, Becky, and quite a mischief, too. That's what makes her so wonderful here. That's what makes a lot of people generous and kind."

The effect of her words were startling. "Then he was wrong! Mr. Goram was wrong! Maybe he was wrong about everything!"

"Of course he was wrong," Nurse said, slipping her arm under the thin shoulders and pillowing Becky's head on her breasts. "Anyone who says such things is bound to be wrong about everything."

"I guess I really knew, inside myself. You see, I remember my mamma. She wasn't bad, like he said. She couldn't help it when they took me away to the home. She was sick—I remember. Really I do—although I was so little. I remember a room high up, and a window with a plant, and I could see over the houses and yards where the children were playing—oh, nurse, I DO remember!"

(Continued on page 35)





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dark stains on a certain engine, that the tragedy had taken place seven minutes before Thwaite returned to his house; the second, that the kitchen hammer, bearing Thwaite's fingerprints, should be in the pocket of the old coat he wore that night.

On the last dreadful morning Thwaite told the chaplain the exact truth. Then he showed the courage which was expected from him.

SONG AT TWILIGHT

(Continued from page 9)

"Of course you do, my sweet. Mr. Goram had no right to say such things."

"She used to sit at a machine and sew—and my mamma, I mean. And she told me such lovely things—things Mr. Goram said were lies. Mrs. Goram said the same. That's why they beat me, I guess."

Nurse Grey stared into the wintry sunlight with bitter eyes. Now she understood! Now everything was plain at last. Little Becky had lived with terror so long that she had not dared cry out even against deadly pain! She had come to them from some farm, suffering from internal injuries and a broken shoulder blade. She had fallen from a haymow—that was all they knew—except that the couple who brought her pleaded poverty—poverty! An uglier word would fit . . . No wonder they had scuttled off like rats!

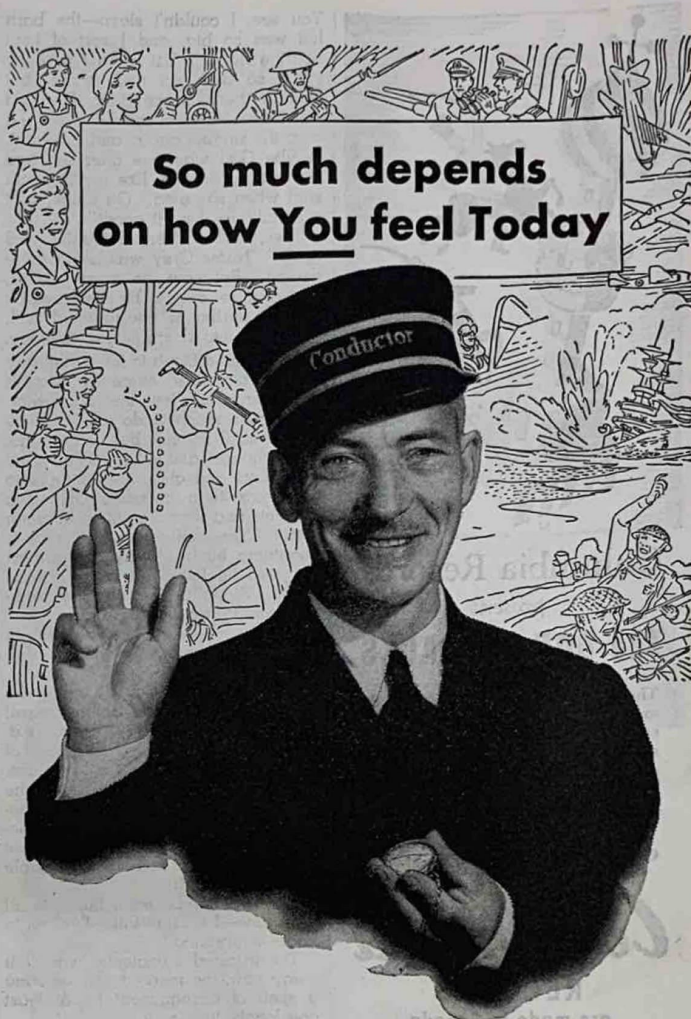
Not without difficulty, Nurse Grey managed to prompt the little girl gently. "But what of the lovely things, Becky? The things that your dear mamma told you? After all, we started out talking of singing, didn't we?"

To her relief, the rigid little body in her arms relaxed, and with a sigh of complete trust, Becky began:

"Oh, yes—I nearly forgot. I—I mean, the other things came between. It was when I ran away. I was so cold, and my feet hurt, but in the home they'd told us about freezing, so I didn't sit down, even when I fell and wanted to. Then I saw the church back from the road. There was a light in the basement, but upstairs it was dark, so I thought maybe I could get warm there before the people came. I didn't want to be in the way, so I crept into the loft and I guess I fell asleep. The singing woke me up. Such lovely singing! I—I thought maybe I was dead. There were so many lights, and down in front there was a place with shining things, and a gold cross, and people all in white with books in their hands. And I thought, Oh! Maybe mamma is there happy and well again. I guess I must have cried out, for a man came and took me into a little dark room—and pretty soon Mrs. Goram came to fetch me back—that was when she said if there were any angels I needn't expect to find my mamma among them."

"My dear! My dear!" Nurse Grey had no available comfort beyond the gentle pressure of her arm to offer. But whatever she might have found to say, it must have fallen short of the miraculous effects which the sudden strains of music, coming from across the hall, had upon the child. The tragic mask of resignation and despair dissolved into one of joyous rapture.

"Oh, nurse—it's like what I dreamed about! Like what I used to think was real when I saw the stars shining down in the night.



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You see, I couldn't sleep—the barn loft was so big, and I sort of kept hearing things. But when I saw the stars, so high up and grand, but smiling there in the dark, I wasn't so scared. Sort of inside myself I'd hear the singing again, and I thought, maybe God was true after all, and wouldn't forget me, like my mamma said when she died. Oh nurse, isn't it beautiful! Isn't it good!

"Yes, dear. Very beautiful and good." Nurse Grey was never more devout. But now the music ended, and a voice, only to be described as the outpouring of hearty good will, launched into a spirited monologue.

It was not difficult to follow the gay lilting voice, for evidently Matron had purposely left the door ajar. There was much to do about Christmas, said the voice, but perhaps not the right sort altogether. "For mind you, boys and girls, there's more to Christmas than choosing Christmas presents and wrapping them in green paper. The really important part is imagining things. Why, if it wasn't for the little folk who know how to dream, Santa Claus and his workshop would have to close down."

"Nurse! Nurse! He said, Santa Claus—he sounded like Santa was real!"

"There, there — of course he sounded real. That's Santa himself talking—" Nurse Grey stopped, alarmed by the swift draining of vital color from the child's face. Conscience stricken, she eased the little girl back on her pillows, consulted the feeble pulse and, somewhat reassured, was reaching out for a restorative from the bed table when she heard:

"I guess maybe even Buzzy's all right now—I mustn't talk—I've got to hear—everything!"

The inspired monologue was well away now, the merry voice weaving a spell of enchantment for at least one lonely little soul.

"It's really a miracle the way thoughts work. Like sunshine and rain on laughing green leaves and spider webs in moonlight! Thoughts have wings, as voices have wings. Of course, you can understand that, or how could you hear me all the way from the blues?"

"Some thoughts have tiny wings and can't go very far, but others—the kind you make into dreams—have wings like angels, and nothing stops them, let me tell you. Not even the highest mountain or the deepest sea! And don't ever believe a really fine dream is wasted, although Santa seems a bit slow getting around to it. The world's a biggish place, my dears, full of clever little folk. But some day, some place, every dream comes back to the little boy or girl who dreamed it, in some kind of gift—some really shining happiness—"

Nurse Grey had no doubt of it as she watched the white radiance of Becky's face. To her starved little soul, each word was a glowing gospel. Even the nonsensical descriptions which followed, of toys on display at Henderson's, were elegies of grace and beauty.

So intent upon watching Becky, she was hardly conscious of what other fancies the inventive narrator hit upon, but all at once she herself was carried away. The rich flowing voice was singing now, soaring away in timeless space on the healing wings of Schubert's immortal harmony. A rush of tears filled her eyes. Whoever he was, this man, his make-believe had something of indelible reality. The beauty of kindness—that was it. The beauty of kindness.

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In the enchanted silence which followed, it was the child who first spoke, faintly, but with a new quality of quiet serenity: "Please, nurse, now I want to tell you about Buzzy."

"My dear, hadn't you better sleep a bit first? Nurse mustn't let you get too tired."

"But it doesn't matter," Becky replied, with the uncanny rationalism of childhood. "I'm not afraid any more—of anything—Oh, I want to tell you about Buzzy!"

"Very well, but then you must take your medicine and try to rest."

"Yes, nurse." The faint, misty smile on the child's face was infinitely touching. "Buzzy was the dearest little cat. I found him in the road. After that it wasn't so lonely in the loft. He was so soft, and made a buzzing kind of noise inside himself. That's why I called him Buzzy. But Mrs. Goram said she wasn't keeping me to feed stray cats, Mr. Goram took him away..."

Nurse Grey's indignation got the upper hand. "Mr. Goram belongs in a zoo, with other—obsolete animals!" she burst out, flushing to the roots of her tidy brown hair.

"He—he wasn't very nice. I hated him then. But now I guess Buzzy's all right—mamma and Buzzy and everything. For you see, I used to dream about it—I used to dream there was a lovely place behind the Dark. And Buzzy would be there somewhere, wouldn't he? He was such a good little cat! Oh, nurse, if I could only ask Mr. Santa Claus—he can't live very far from there, do you think?"

"No, dear, not very far," Nurse agreed, with muffled tensiety, for a quite mad scheme was forming in her mind. "Now take your powders for nurse. And when you go to sleep, think your most shining thoughts, and, who knows? Santa may see them like a ring of stars above the hospital and come hurrying through the twilight to find the child whose lovely light they are!"

"Oh, nurse, I love you! Maybe you didn't know—but I do. And will you think, too, about Buzzy—how white and soft he was, with a little pink tongue, and blue, blue eyes..."

Nurse Grey was not given to assumption of authority, but as she presented her scheme to Matron MacGillivray in the latter's office, she was far from humble.

"It may sound crazy—no doubt it was never done under such circumstances," she concluded belligerently. "But isn't it worth trying since everything else has failed?"

The Matron stopped her with an imperative gesture. Turning to the telephone on her orderly desk, she calmly dialed a number.

"Henderson's Department Store? Give me the toy department. Yes—wherever one gets in touch with Santa Claus—"

AT her battle-scarred desk in the fourth floor cubicle that served as the Santa Claus post office at Henderson's, Harriet Blossom sat staring out the window. A curious, unprecedented phenomenon in an attractive young lady whose cold efficiency and laconic retorts kept the errand girls jumping, and Jimmy Brant, of the music department, in a continual emotional furore.

But it was Harriet who persuaded Mr. Traine to feature Jimmy as Santa Claus because he could sing, and even the kids must be fed up by now on the perennial Blitzen blather. Mr. Traine, sensible man, agreed, but Jimmy, the fool romantic, had been grouching and growling ever

since. It did violence to his feelings! Going about in whiskers and a red suit, shaking kids by the hand, and bleating a lot of commercialized sentiment for publicity purposes, killed the Spirit of Christmas, said he. And this noon when Grandview Charity Hospital sent in a request for a special number, he almost had a fit! Pulling that rot on kids who had parents ready to participate in the silly hoax wasn't so bad. But sick kids—!

And the worst of it was, since hearing his afternoon programme, Harriet wasn't so sure of herself. Those sick kids had certainly got under his skin. That song of his had made her feel darn queer.

The telephone ringing sharply made her jump. With a shrug of impatience at herself, she lifted the receiver.

"Henderson's Toyland," she said ritually. Then suddenly straightened stiffly, stammered, and for the first time in her efficient career asked a customer twice to repeat herself. "Beg pardon, madam? Yes—the Santa Claus feature—beg pardon? Oh, why yes. He should be back any moment. Yes, yes, madam, I'm listening."

Monica, one of the badgered errand girls, rushing in for last minute orders, gasped in astonishment. Never had she surprised such an expression on the impertinent Miss Blossom's saucy round face. Why, she actually looked as if she'd burst out crying!

"Yes, madam, I understand." Even her voice sounded queer, reflected Monica, drawing closer. "I'm sure the management will be glad to oblige. Oh no! Mr. Brant—that is, Santa—would never refuse. Yes—not later than eight o'clock—right! Oh, madam, if you'd allow me, perhaps I could help with the kitten. White, you said? Thank you, madam."

"Say, what is this? From your face I thought the Campbells were coming and it's only kittens!"

breath and, as usual, oblivious of such commonplaces as banging doors and hasting virgins.

"Hi, there! Where's the circus?" he shouted after the long-legged streak of haste and, grinning at the face she pulled over her shoulder, entered Harriet's cubicle to cry out in consternation. "Why, Harriet, honey!"

By no means sure he wasn't dreaming, Jimmy, unrebuked, put his arms about the dainty figure, limp and incredibly appealing as she wept into the ink-stained handkerchief.

"See here—you've been working too hard. What about dinner and a movie?"

"Oh, Jimmy!" Harriet disentangled herself. "Jimmy Brant, you've done the doggondest thing!" she wailed. "The doggondest lovely thing!"

And then, as calmly as she could, she explained about the little girl at Grandview who was praying for Santa to put her broken world right.

"But Harriet—Oh, I say, this is serious. I'm scared, honest. The little thing might not stand the excitement!"

"Jimmy, after hearing you today, I know you'll get it straight in a minute. It wouldn't be excitement, but a miracle—all her poor little dreams come true!"

"Maybe so. But just the same—"

"Now don't argue! Look at the time! We've got to go to a pet shop and find a white kitten before six o'clock."

"You mean you're coming, too?" asked Jimmy, still a bit dazed by the enheartening change in Harriet.

"Of course I'm coming. Remember this, you—you lovable humbug! I'll be rooting for you every minute of the time. Oh, Jimmy—" she broke off on a queer, hybrid note, half laugh, half sob, and thrust him away, ashamed of emotional display, but determined to say what was in her heart. "You're grand—you'd sing a soul into Scrooge! Even I



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"Ho! Ho! Will it be hard to find the little rascal! Well, what do you think?"

"Oh, Monica, shut up! That was the matron of Grandview Hospital. There's a little kid there thinks Santa Claus is some sort of angel. Well, stop staring! Go find Mr. Traine. I've got to see him to get permission for Jimmy to use the costume tonight."

Poor Monica, whisking out of the room with inspired urgency, almost collided with Jimmy, who was coming round the corner, his nose buried in sheet music, humming under his

believed in miracles this afternoon, for, while you were singing, I was little again, back in Grandma's old house, with the big tree gleaming softly in the firelight, a dozen mysterious bundles tucked in its breast, and a big silver star on its forehead. Oh, Jimmy, don't you see? With a gift like yours, you couldn't fail! You couldn't, Jimmy, because that's what it's for—making beauty come true—all the broken pieces whole again!"

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ROLLED OATS BATTER PUDDING

4 medium apples ½ cup sifted all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons sugar 2 teaspoons baking powder
¼ cup milk flavoured fat
¼ cup brown sugar ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
1 egg ¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon vanilla ½ cup milk
¾ cup OGILVIE OATS

Peel, core, and slice apples. Place in a greased baking dish and sprinkle with sugar. Cream fat, add sugar and cream well together. Add beaten egg and vanilla. Beat well. Mix dry ingredients and add alternately with milk to creamed mixture. Pour over apples and bake in a moderate oven, 350°F., for 40 minutes. Yield: 6 servings. Note—Other sweetened, fresh or drained canned fruit may be used instead of apples.

SAVOURY STUFFING FOR FOWL

1 cup OGILVIE OATS ¼ teaspoon pepper
4 cups soft bread crumbs 1½ teaspoons poultry seasoning
¾ cup chopped onion ½ cup fat, melted
1 teaspoon salt ½ cup water

Place OGILVIE OATS and bread crumbs in bowl. Add onion, seasonings, melted fat and water. Blend thoroughly. Yield: 5½ cups. Will stuff a five to six-pound chicken.

Jimmy felt the need of this comfort when, after a very casual and, he thought, rather cold interview with Matron MacGillivray, he was hurrying into his costume in the terribly silent sunroom of Grandview Hospital. Harriet was out in the hall, which made him feel absurdly lost and nervous. Of course there was no cause for alarm. The Matron had been brightly assuring on that point. The little girl, Becky, had had a restful sleep, and her nurse, who would remain with her, knew exactly how to introduce the visit. Jimmy fervently hoped she did, for up to the moment his own mind had been a perfect blank. But they were right, those calm, austere women. There was nothing the least harrowing in Number Nine. The room was very quiet, that was all, and the little bed made him think of a tiny boat at anchor in still waters.

Nurse Grey was speaking to the little patient, hidden from him by the unformed figure.

"Becky, I've wonderful news for you, dear. While you slept something lovely happened. Can you guess?"

"Oh, nurse—did it really happen? Did—did Mr. Santa get our thoughts—like he said he would?"

"Yes, darling. What's more, he jumped into his fastest sleigh and came right to the hospital. He's here, Becky, waiting to see you!"

Nurse stepped aside, and Jimmy, his heart pounding heavily, came forward quickly. Nothing had prepared him for the eery loveliness of the thin little face with its enormous eyes smiling up at him in enraptured delight. Whatever he had meant to say was completely lost before that look of faith and spontaneous joy, which he knew he should never see again in worshipping human eyes.

"But you are beautiful!" The thin, silvery thread of sound touched him deeply. "You're as beautiful as mamma said. Oh, please, now you've come, you'll tell me about Buzzy, and—everything?"

"Now, young lady, don't rush an old chap after a race through the clouds," said Jimmy, accepting the chair Nurse placed for him beside the bed. "But I dare say we might begin with him if you like, although to tell the truth, Mr. Buzzy cuts up considerable in Fairyland! Twice he stole some milk or honey, and once, I understand, he ate the Queen's salad while she was saying grace!"

"Oh! Oh! You've seen him! But of course, he shouldn't have done that! From the Queen, too!" Joy and distress struggled in the frail voice. "Maybe he's kind of an orphan up there. Mr. Santa, would it be very hard to find him, do you think?"

Jimmy winced at the implication. Poor baby! How hurt she must have been. Poor lonely little thing. Fumbling the catch of the basket he managed to raise a fairly jolly chuckle. "Ho! Ho! Will it be hard to find the little rascal! Well, what do you think?"

And there before Becky's astonished eyes, Mr. Santa materialized the beloved little ball of fluff, white as cotton, and with a saucy blue bow to match its winking blue eyes!

"Oh, Buzzy, Buzzy!" Out flew the thin little arms, and, marvel of delight, the nice, living creature snuggled contentedly in their desolate embrace. "Isn't he beautiful, Nurse? Isn't he just as I said? Oh, Mr. Santal! Will he have to go back? Right away, I mean?"

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"With twenty thousand socks to fill in a week's time? Not if I can help it!" Jimmy snorted. "My dear little friend, Mr. Buzzy hasn't the least sense of discretion. He thinks nothing of creeping into the toes of my arctic boots! And twice he scared poor Blitzen almost out of his antlers by going to sleep in his nose bag. Oh no—Mr. Buzzy has made his bed. Now he must lie in it! At least, till after Christmas."

"Mr. Santa, I don't believe you've told me everything," said the child, in a passionate whisper. "I don't think you have! I think God sent me Buzzy like He did once before, because I was afraid of the dark."

Jimmy met this emergency with inspired assurance. "Becky, the best gift comes last. Up there in the blue, we wondered what to give the bravest little girl we knew. At last, I thought to myself, there's nothing half so fine as a song. But it must be a lovely thing—lovelier than dreams! Now where could I get such a song, thought I. Not on earth, where so many sad things come between the sun. Not in Fairyland, either, for there nothing darker than cobwebs shade the sky. But beyond the blue, the bright angels often walk to and fro, singing in a soft, green garden. There's where I'll get my song, said I, and I got it. But who do you think sang it to me, up there in the golden twilight?"

Unforgettable, the dewy smile in the enormous eyes now. "Yes—I can guess—Oh, please, Mr. Santa, sing it now! Buzzy's getting kind of sleepy, 'cause his insides are humming, and I want him to hear my Christmas song too. And—maybe I'd better say goodbye now. I might forget and fall asleep. I feel so nice and warm inside."

Jimmy received a nod of approval from Nurse Grey, who came to the bedside and tucked up the covers. He hitched his chair forward. He was smiling, but his voice was a little strained as he began in a crooning undertone:

"Oh little one and dearest, oh little one and true,
The stars are bright, and my thoughts are light
As I stand and wait for you;

"By the soft grey road that winding
Comes up from the deep green sod,
To the silver hills and the golden rills
Of the beautiful garden of God.

"Oh little one and dearest, oh little one and true,
Now close your eyes while the long day dies
And my song drifts down to you."

As the melodious voice sang on, serenity and peace filled the room. Nurse Grey stood very still, her tired face transfixed with quiet happiness. The day of miracles was not ended. Becky was smiling—all the chill and terror gone from her dear child eyes. Smiling and utterly content, the long dark battle won at last.

Over and over, with understanding patience, Jimmy crooned his song, until the melody faded to a whisper that mingled softly with the child's easy breathing.

"I won't try to thank you," Nurse Grey said. "Your own heart will do that. But I imagine the stars will seem very close as you go home tonight, Mr. Brant."

And how true that was. How close and intimate and like the shining lamps of home they seemed, as his car nosed into the deserted road that wound ahead in the starlight like a fine white ribbon. How beautiful it

44-42

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was in the quiet country, with Harriet's russet head on his shoulder, and the friendly hum of the good old motor droning in the crisp, clean air!

But it was Harriet, whose pert flippancies had often been so wounding, who suddenly, and with passionate sincerity, tried to find adequate words for the exquisite moment.

"Oh, Jimmy, it's not the same world, really. This morning it was a cold hurly-burly of cranky Christmas shoppers, and now it's as though you and I and that dear little thing back there, and everyone else who ever dreamed of lovely, foolish things, were part of something very real. Something that won't let love and hope and human happiness be lost forever. Oh, Jimmy, it wouldn't surprise me if the stones along the way started singing 'Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men!'"



AND WEST IS WEST

(Continued from page 13)

"Oh, around. How are you, Burch?" "Happy," Burch said, looking at Lea with that warm quick sincere smile that made people like him. Burch never had to act. There was nothing on earth he was so completely sold on as his own moods.

"I hate to break this up, but"—he slipped his arm lightly about Lea's slim shoulders and looked down at her with proprietary delight—"I've got to see a fellow at the Lamsb some time before daybreak and we'd better be shoving along. Wish us *bon marriage*, old man"; and he gave Scott the same smile.

"If he was only like that really!" Scott thought. "Or, rather, like that all the time! But he's like so many things!" he thought bitterly, "... damn him!"

"I wish you all the luck in the world," he said sincerely, meaning it on the girl's account. And then his heart went out to Burch—people couldn't keep their hearts from doing that—and he shook him warmly by the hand. "And I congratulate you."

"I'm going away tomorrow for a couple of weeks," Burch said, "leaving this infant quite on the town. If you weren't too busy to see her a time or two—"

And so Scott found himself invited in where he wanted to go. It was like Burch, he thought. Burch never could consider himself in danger from another man where women were concerned—felt always that it was the other way about—and with reason. "And I," Scott thought, "have been ticketed in his mind as a sort of woman's home companion—safe for any of 'em—just because I've never gone philandering round."

THE next morning he called her up.

"Do you like to ride? I've got two horses down on Long Island—rented ones, of course, but they're good."

"I was practically born on a horse—how did you know?"

"I didn't. It's just luck—like meeting you last night. Could I pick you up at two, say, and drive you down? I've been saving my gas for something extra special, and this is it." . . .

The horses struck a rhythm like two beats in the same tune. The whine of saddle leather was pleasant in Scott's ears. The first leaves of Fall were fluttering down. Blue water glistened through the trees and the air was soft cool-flavored and sweet.

"Nobody from this part of the country ever rode like that," she said. "What's your State, Westerner?"

Be yours

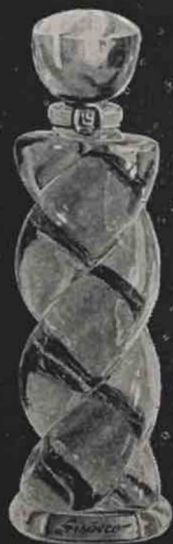
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