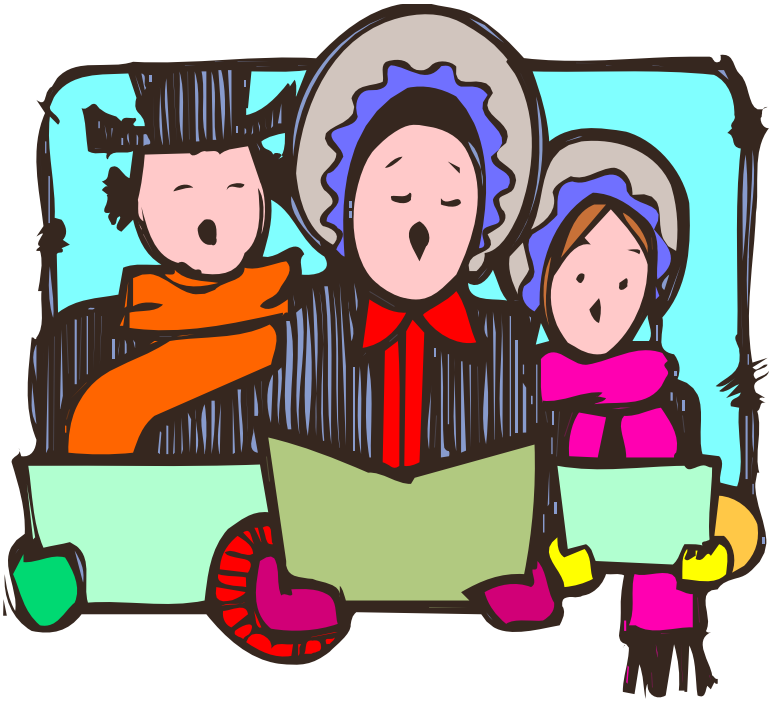
CLASSIC CHRISTMAS STORIES



Brought To You By

Donna Trumble

Classic Christmas Stories
Introduction

The following collection of Christmas stories remind us of the true treasures of family and the hope that stirs within the soul. Christmas is a fabulous time for sharing and giving.

Yet there are many who get distracted by the glitter and the greed of the season.

My hope is that by reading and sharing these treasured stories of Christmas, you will have that amazing spirit of Christmas rekindled in a fresh new way.

This collection is my gift to you.

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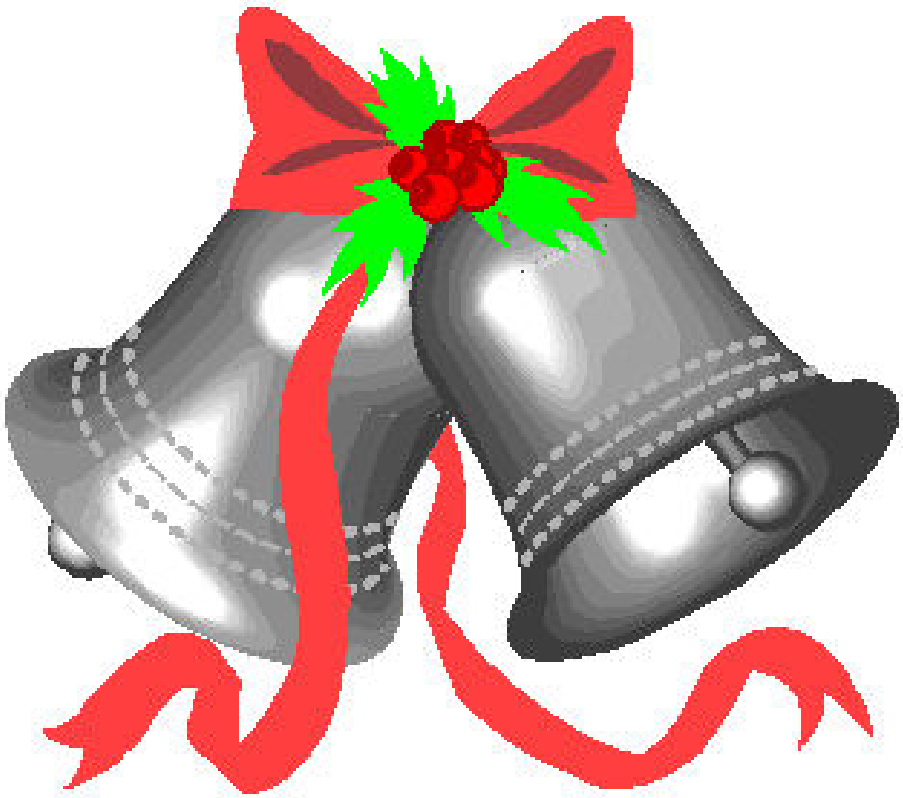

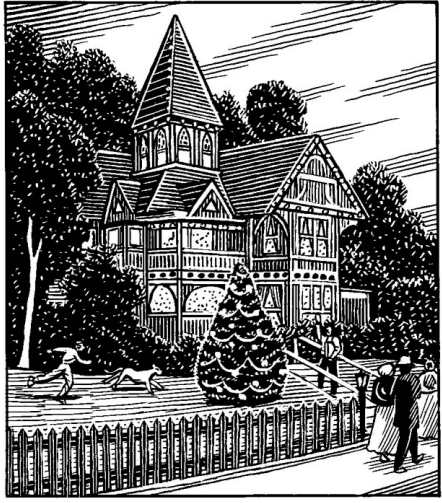

THE FIR-TREE*
HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

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Out in the woods stood a nice little Fir-tree. The place he had was a very good one; the sun shone on him; as to fresh air, there was enough of that, and round him grew many large-sized comrades, pines as well as firs. But the little Fir wanted so very much to be a grown-up tree.

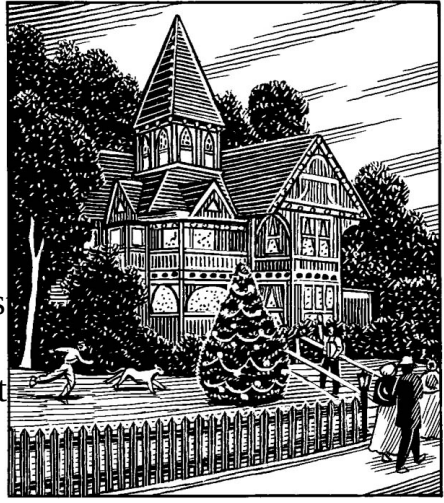
He did not think of the warm sun and of the fresh air; he did not care for the little cottage children that ran about and prattled when they were in the woods looking for wild strawberries. The children often came with a whole pitcher full of berries, or a long row of them threaded on a straw, and sat down near the young tree and said, "Oh, how pretty he is! what a nice little fir!" But this was what the Tree could not bear to hear.

At the end of a year he had shot up a good deal, and after another year he was another long bit taller; for with fir-trees one can always tell by the shoots how many years old they are.

"Oh, were I but such a high tree as the others are!" sighed he. "Then I should be able to spread out my branches, and with the tops to look into the wide world! Then would the birds build nests among my branches; and when there was a breeze, I could bend with as much stateliness as the others!"

Neither the sunbeams, nor the birds, nor the red clouds, which morning and evening sailed above them, gave the little Tree any pleasure.

In winter, when the snow lay glittering on the ground, a hare would often come leaping along, and jump right over the little Tree. Oh, that made him so angry! But two winters were past, and in the third the tree was so large that the hare was obliged to go round it. "To grow and grow, to get older and be tall," thought the Tree--"that, after all, is



the most delightful thing in the world!"

In autumn the wood-cutters always came and felled some of the larges trees. This happened every year; and the young Fir-tree, that had now grown to a very comely size, trembled at the sight; for the magnificent great trees fell to the earth with noise and cracking, the branches were lopped off, and the trees looked long and bare; they were hardly to be recognized; and then they were laid in carts, and the horses dragged them out of the woods.

Where did they go to? What became of them?

In spring, when the Swallows and the Storks came, the Tree asked them, "Don't you know where they have been taken? Have you not met them anywhere?"

The Swallows did not know anything about it; but the Stork looked musing, nodded his head, and said: "Yes, I think I know; I met many ships as I was flying hither from Egypt; on the ships were magnificent masts, and I venture to assert that it was they that smelt so of fir. I may congratulate you, for they lifted themselves on high most majestically!"

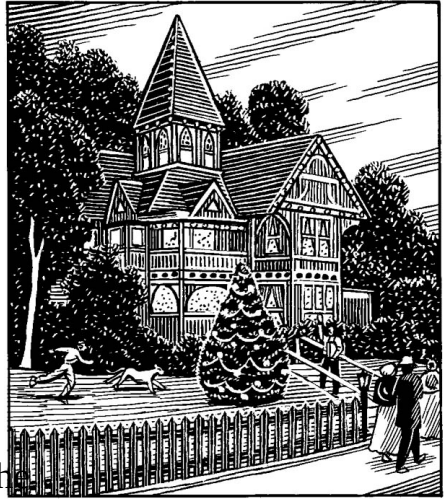
"Oh, were I but old enough to fly across the sea! But how does the sea look in reality? What is it like?"

"That would take a long time to explain," said the Stork, and with these words off he went.

"Rejoice in thy growth!" said the Sunbeams, "rejoice in thy vigorous growth, and in the fresh life that moveth within thee!"

And the Wind kissed the Tree, and the Dew wept tears over him; but the Fir understood it not.

When Christmas came, quite young trees were cut down; trees which often were not even as large or of the same age as this Fir-tree, who could never rest, but always wanted to be off. These young trees, and they were always the finest looking, retained their branches; they were laid



on carts, and the horses drew them out of the woods.

"Where are they going to?" asked the Fir. "They are not taller than I; there was one indeed that was considerably shorter; and why do they retain all their branches? Whither are they taken?"

"We know! we know!" chirped the Sparrows. "We have peeped in at the windows in the town below! We know whither they are taken! The greatest splendour and the greatest magnificence one can imagine await them. We peeped through the windows, and saw them planted in the middle of the warm room, and ornamented with the most splendid things--with gilded apples, with gingerbread, with toys, and many hundred lights!"

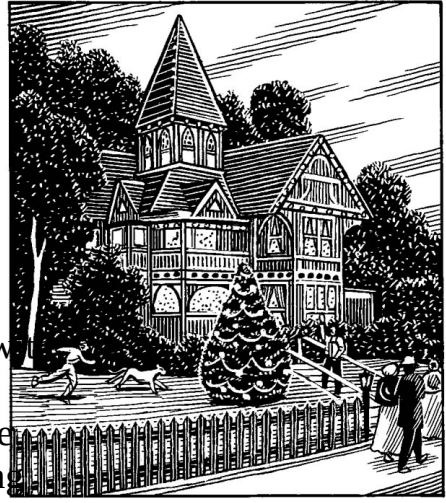
"And then?" asked the Fir-tree, trembling in every bough. "And then? What happens then?"

"We did not see anything more: it was incomparably beautiful."

"I would fain know if I am destined for so glorious a career," cried the Tree, rejoicing. "That is still better than to cross the sea! What a longing do I suffer! Were Christmas but come! I am now tall, and my branches spread like the others that were carried off last year! Oh, were I but already on the cart. Were I in the warm room with all the splendour and magnificence! Yes; then something better, something still grander, will surely follow, or wherefore should they thus ornament me? Something better, something still grander, MUST follow--but what? Oh, how I long, how I suffer! I do not know myself what is the matter with me!"

"Rejoice in our presence!" said the Air and the Sunlight; "rejoice in thy own fresh youth!"

But the Tree did not rejoice at all; he grew and grew, and was green both winter and summer. People that saw him said, "What a fine tree!" and toward Christmas he was one of the first that was cut down. The axe struck deep into the very pith; the tree fell to the earth with a sigh: he felt a pang--it was like a swoon; he could not think of happiness, for he was sorrowful at being separated from his home, from the place where he had sprung up. He knew well that he should never see his dear



old comrades, the little bushes and flowers around him, any more; perhaps not even the birds! The departure was not at all agreeable.

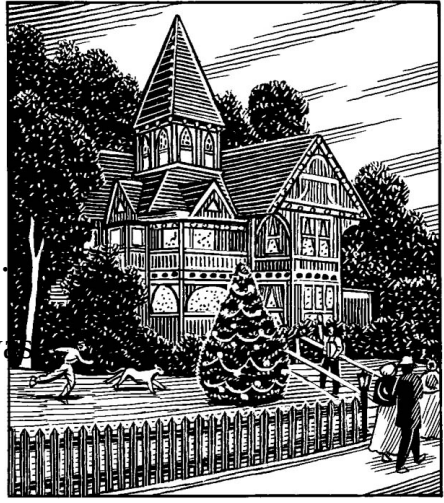
The Tree only came to himself when he was unloaded in a courtyard with the other trees, and heard a man say, "That one is splendid! we don't want the others." Then two servants came in rich livery and carried the Fir-tree into a large and splendid drawing-room. Portraits were hanging on the walls, and near the white porcelain stove stood two large Chinese vases with lions on the covers. There, too, were large easy chairs, silken sofas, large tables full of picture-books, and full of toys worth hundreds and hundreds of crowns--at least the children said so. And the Fir-tree was stuck upright in a cask that was filled with sand: but no one could see that it was a cask, for green cloth was hung all around it, and it stood on a large gayly coloured carpet. Oh, how the Tree quivered! What was to happen? The servants, as well as the young ladies, decorated it. On one branch there hung little nets cut out of coloured paper, and each net was filled with sugar-plums; and among the other boughs gilded apples and walnuts were suspended, looking as though they had grown there, and little blue and white tapers were placed among the leaves. Dolls that looked for all the world like men--the Tree had never beheld such before--were seen among the foliage, and at the very top a large star of gold tinsel was fixed. It was really splendid--beyond description splendid.

"This evening!" said they all; "how it will shine this evening!"

"Oh," thought the Tree, "if the evening were but come! If the tapers were but lighted! And then I wonder what will happen! Perhaps the other trees from the forest will come to look at me! Perhaps the sparrows will beat against the window-panes! I wonder if I shall take root here, and winter and summer stand covered with ornaments!"

He knew very much about the matter! but he was so impatient that for sheer longing he got a pain in his back, and this with trees is the same thing as a headache with us.

The candles were now lighted. What brightness! What splendour! The Tree trembled so in every bough that one of the tapers set fire to the foliage. It blazed up splendidly.



"Help! Help!" cried the young ladies, and they quickly put out the fire.

Now the Tree did not even dare tremble. What a state he was in! He was so uneasy lest he should lose something of his splendour, that he was quite bewildered amidst the glare and brightness; when suddenly both folding-doors opened, and a troop of children rushed in as if they would upset the Tree. The older persons followed quietly; the little ones stood quite still. But it was only for a moment; then they shouted so that the whole place reechoed with their rejoicing; they danced round the tree, and one present after the other was pulled off.

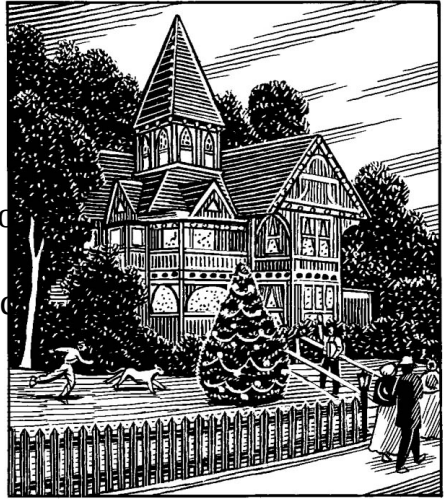
"What are they about?" thought the Tree. "What is to happen now?" And the lights burned down to the very branches, and as they burned down they were put out, one after the other, and then the children had permission to plunder the tree. So they fell upon it with such violence that all its branches cracked; if it had not been fixed firmly in the cask, it would certainly have tumbled down.

The children danced about with their beautiful playthings: no one looked at the Tree except the old nurse, who peeped between the branches; but it was only to see if there was a fig or an apple left that had been forgotten.

"A story! a story!" cried the children, drawing a little fat man toward the tree. He seated himself under it, and said: "Now we are in the shade, and the Tree can listen, too. But I shall tell only one story. Now which will you have: that about Ivedy-Avedy, or about Klumpy-Dumpy who tumbled downstairs, and yet after all came to the throne and married the princess?"

"Ivedy-Avedy!" cried some; "Klumpy-Dumpy" cried the others. There was such a bawling and screaming--the Fir-tree alone was silent, and he thought to himself, "Am I not to bawl with the rest?--am I to do nothing whatever?" for he was one of the company, and had done what he had to do.

And the man told about Klumpy-Dumpy that tumbled down, who notwithstanding came to the throne, and at last married the princess.



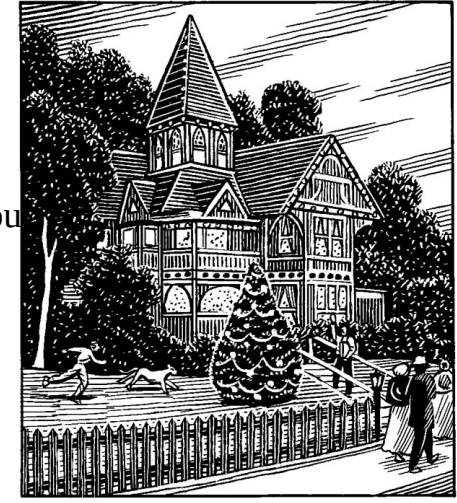
And the children clapped their hands, and cried out, "Oh, go on! Do go on!" They wanted to hear about Ivedy-Avedy, too, but the little man only told them about Klumpy-Dumpy. The Fir-tree stood quite still and absorbed in thought; the birds in the woods had never related the like of this. "Klumpy-Dumpy fell downstairs, and yet he married the princess! Yes! Yes! that's the way of the world!" thought the Fir-tree, and believed it all, because the man who told the story was so good-looking. "Well, well! who knows, perhaps I may fall downstairs, too, and get a princess as wife!" And he looked forward with joy to the morrow, when he hoped to be decked out again with lights, playthings, fruits, and tinsel.

"I won't tremble to-morrow," thought the Fir-tree. "I will enjoy to the full all my splendour. To-morrow I shall hear again the story of Klumpy-Dumpy, and perhaps that of Ivedy-Avedy, too." And the whole night the Tree stood still and in deep thought.

In the morning the servant and the housemaid came in.

"Now, then, the splendour will begin again," thought the Fir. But they dragged him out of the room, and up the stairs into the loft; and here in a dark corner, where no daylight could enter, they left him. "What's the meaning of this?" thought the Tree. "What am I to do here? What shall I hear now, I wonder?" And he leaned against the wall, lost in reverie. Time enough had he, too, for his reflections; for days and nights passed on, and nobody came up; and when at last somebody did come, it was only to put some great trunks in a corner out of the way. There stood the Tree quite hidden; it seemed as if he had been entirely forgotten.

"'Tis now winter out of doors!" thought the Tree. "The earth is hard and covered with snow; men cannot plant me now, and therefore I have been put up here under shelter till the springtime comes! How thoughtful that is! How kind man is, after all! If it only were not so dark here, and so terribly lonely! Not even a hare. And out in the woods it was so pleasant, when the snow was on the ground, and the hare leaped by; yes--even when he jumped over me; but I did not like it then. It is really terribly lonely here!"



"Squeak! squeak!" said a little Mouse at the same moment, peeping out of his hole. And then another little one came. They sniffed about the Fir-tree, and rustled among the branches.

"It is dreadfully cold," said the Mouse. "But for that, it would be delightful here, old Fir, wouldn't it?"

"I am by no means old," said the Fir-tree. "There's many a one considerably older than I am."

"Where do you come from," asked the Mice; "and what can you do?" They were so extremely curious. "Tell us about the most beautiful spot on the earth. Have you never been there? Were you never in the larder, where cheeses lie on the shelves, and hams hang from above; where one dances about on tallow-candles; that place where one enters lean, and comes out again fat and portly?"

"I know no such place," said the Tree, "but I know the woods, where the sun shines, and where the little birds sing." And then he told all about his youth; and the little Mice had never heard the like before; and they listened and said:

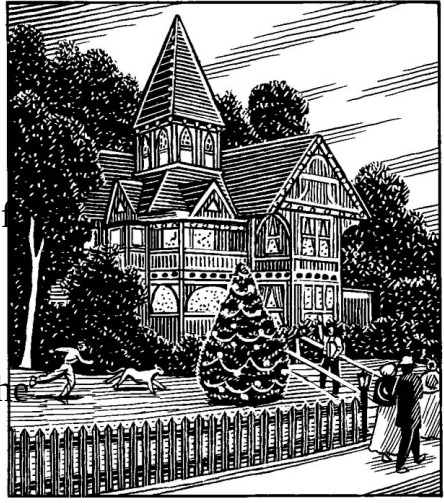
"Well, to be sure! How much you have seen! How happy you must have been!"

"I?" said the Fir-tree, thinking over what he had himself related. "Yes, in reality those were happy times." And then he told about Christmas Eve, when he was decked out with cakes and candles.

"Oh," said the little Mice, "how fortunate you have been, old Fir-tree!"

"I am by no means old," said he. "I came from the woods this winter; I am in my prime, and am only rather short for my age."

"What delightful stories you know!" said the Mice: and the next night they came with four other little Mice, who were to hear what the tree recounted; and the more he related, the more plainly he remembered all himself; and it appeared as if those times had really been happy times. "But they may still come--they may still come. Klumpy-Dumpy fell



downstairs and yet he got a princess," and he thought at the moment of a nice little Birch-tree growing out in the woods; to the Fir, that would be a real charming princess.

"Who is Klumpy-Dumpy?" asked the Mice. So then the Fir-tree told the whole fairy tale, for he could remember every single word of it; and the little Mice jumped for joy up to the very top of the Tree. Next night two more Mice came, and on Sunday two Rats, even; but they said the stories were not interesting, which vexed the little Mice; and they, too, now began to think them not so very amusing either.

"Do you know only one story?" asked the Rats.

"Only that one," answered the Tree. "I heard it on my happiest evening; but I did not then know how happy I was."

"It is a very stupid story. Don't you know one about bacon and tallow candles? Can't you tell any larder stories?"

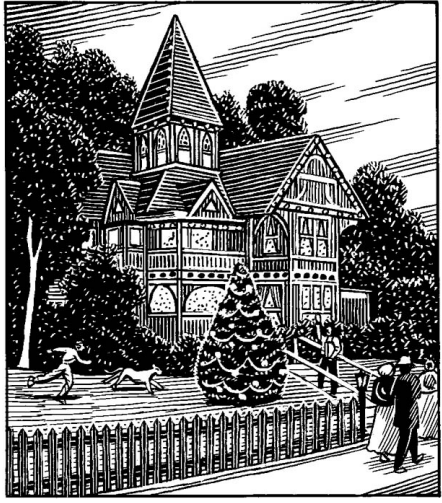
"No," said the Tree.

"Then good-bye," said the Rats; and they went home.

At last the little Mice stayed away also; and the Tree sighed: "After all, it was very pleasant when the sleek little Mice sat around me and listened to what I told them. Now that too is over. But I will take good care to enjoy myself when I am brought out again."

But when was that to be? Why, one morning there came a quantity of people and set to work in the loft. The trunks were moved, the Tree was pulled out and thrown--rather hard, it is true--down on the floor, but a man drew him toward the stairs, where the daylight shone.

"Now a merry life will begin again," thought the Tree. He felt the fresh air, the first sunbeam--and now he was out in the courtyard. All passed so quickly, there was so much going on around him, that the Tree quite forgot to look to himself. The court adjoined a garden, and all was in flower; the roses hung so fresh and odorous over the balustrade, the lindens were in blossom, the Swallows flew by, and said,



"Quirre-vit! my husband is come!" but it was not the Fir-tree that they meant.

"Now, then, I shall really enjoy life," said he, exultingly, and spread out his branches; but, alas! they were all withered and yellow. It was in a corner that he lay, among weeds and nettles. The golden star of tinsel was still on the top of the Tree, and glittered in the sunshine.

In the courtyard some of the merry children were playing who had danced at Christmas round the Fir-tree, and were so glad at the sight of him. One of the youngest ran and tore off the golden star.

"Only look what is still on the ugly old Christmas tree!" said he, trampling on the branches, so that they all cracked beneath his feet. And the Tree beheld all the beauty of the flowers, and the freshness in the garden; he beheld himself, and wished he had remained in his dark corner in the loft; he thought of his first youth in the woods, of the merry Christmas Eve, and of the little Mice who had listened with so much pleasure to the story of Klumpy-Dumpy.

"'Tis over--'tis past!" said the poor Tree. "Had I but rejoiced when I had reason to do so! But now 'tis past, 'tis past!"

And the gardener's boy chopped the Tree into small pieces; there was a whole heap lying there. The wood flamed up splendidly under the large brewing copper, and it sighed so deeply! Each sigh was like a shot.

The boys played about in the court, and the youngest wore the gold star on his breast which the Tree had had on the happiest evening of his life. However, that was over now--the Tree gone, the story at an end. All, all was over; every tale must end at last.

THE CHRISTMAS MASQUERADE*
MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

On Christmas Eve the Mayor's stately mansion presented a beautiful appearance. There were rows of different coloured wax candles burning in every window, and beyond them one could see the chandeliers of gold and crystal blazing with light. The fiddles were squeaking merrily, and lovely little forms flew past the windows in time to the music.

There were gorgeous carpets laid from the door to the street, and carriages were constantly arriving and fresh guests tripping over them. They were all children. The Mayor was giving a Christmas Masquerade tonight to all the children in the city, the poor as well as the rich. The preparation for this ball had been making an immense sensation for the last three months. Placards had been up in the most conspicuous points in the city, and all the daily newspapers had at least a column devoted to it, headed with "THE MAYOR'S CHRISTMAS MASQUERADE," in very large letters.

The Mayor had promised to defray the expenses of all the poor children whose parents were unable to do so, and the bills for their costumes were directed to be sent in to him.

Of course there was great excitement among the regular costumers of the city, and they all resolved to vie with one another in being the most popular, and the best patronized on this gala occasion. But the placards and the notices had not been out a week before a new Costumer appeared who cast all the others into the shade directly. He set up his shop on the corner of one of the principal streets, and hung up his beautiful costumes in the windows. He was a little fellow, not much bigger than a boy of ten. His cheeks were as red as roses, and he had on a long curling wig as white as snow. He wore a suit of crimson velvet knee-breeches, and a little swallow-tailed coat with beautiful

golden buttons. Deep lace ruffles fell over his slender white hands, and he wore elegant knee buckles of glittering stones. He sat on a high stool behind his counter and served his customers himself; he kept no clerk.

It did not take the children long to discover what beautiful things he had, and how superior he was to the other costumers, and they begun to flock to his shop immediately, from the Mayor's daughter to the poor ragpicker's. The children were to select their own costumes; the Mayor had stipulated that. It was to be a children's ball in every sense of the word.

So they decided to be fairies and shepherdesses, and princesses according to their own fancies; and this new Costumer had charming costumes to suit them.

It was noticeable that, for the most part, the children of the rich, who had always had everything they desired, would choose the parts of goose-girls and peasants and such like; and the poor children jumped eagerly at the chance of being princesses or fairies for a few hours in their miserable lives.

When Christmas Eve came and the children flocked into the Mayor's mansion, whether it was owing to the Costumer's art, or their own adaptation to the characters they had chosen, it was wonderful how lifelike their representations were. Those little fairies in their short skirts of silken gauze, in which golden sparkles appeared as they moved with their little funny gossamer wings, like butterflies, looked like real fairies. It did not seem possible, when they floated around to the music, half supported on the tips of their dainty toes, half by their filmy purple wings, their delicate bodies swaying in time, that they could be anything but fairies. It seemed absurd to imagine that they were Johnny Mullens, the washerwoman's son, and Polly Flinders, the charwoman's little girl, and so on.

The Mayor's daughter, who had chosen the character of a goose-girl, looked so like a true one that one could hardly dream she ever was anything else. She was, ordinarily, a slender, dainty little lady rather tall for her age. She now looked very short and stubbed and

brown, just as if she had been accustomed to tend geese in all sorts of weather. It was so with all the others--the Red Riding-hoods, the princesses, the Bo-Peeps and with every one of the characters who came to the Mayor's ball; Red Riding-hood looked round, with big, frightened eyes, all ready to spy the wolf, and carried her little pat of butter and pot of honey gingerly in her basket; Bo-Peep's eyes looked red with weeping for the loss of her sheep; and the princesses swept about so grandly in their splendid brocaded trains, and held their crowned heads so high that people half-believed them to be true princesses.

But there never was anything like the fun at the Mayor's Christmas ball. The fiddlers fiddled and fiddled, and the children danced and danced on the beautiful waxed floors. The Mayor, with his family and a few grand guests, sat on a dais covered with blue velvet at one end of the dancing hall, and watched the sport. They were all delighted. The Mayor's eldest daughter sat in front and clapped her little soft white hands. She was a tall, beautiful young maiden, and wore a white dress, and a little cap woven of blue violets on her yellow hair. Her name was Violetta.

The supper was served at midnight--and such a supper! The mountains of pink and white ices, and the cakes with sugar castles and flower gardens on the tops of them, and the charming shapes of gold and ruby-coloured jellies. There were wonderful bonbons which even the Mayor's daughter did not have every day; and all sorts of fruits, fresh and candied. They had cowslip wine in green glasses, and elderberry wine in red, and they drank each other's health. The glasses held a thimbleful each; the Mayor's wife thought that was all the wine they ought to have. Under each child's plate there was a pretty present and every one had a basket of bonbons and cake to carry home.

At four o'clock the fiddlers put up their fiddles and the children went home; fairies and shepherdesses and pages and princesses all jabbering gleefully about the splendid time they had had.

But in a short time what consternation there was throughout the city. When the proud and fond parents attempted to unbutton their children's dresses, in order to prepare them for bed, not a single costume would come off. The buttons buttoned again as fast as they were unbuttoned;

even if they pulled out a pin, in it would slip again in a twinkling; and when a string was untied it tied itself up again into a bowknot. The parents were dreadfully frightened. But the children were so tired out they finally let them go to bed in their fancy costumes and thought perhaps they would come off better in the morning. So Red Riding-hood went to bed in her little red cloak holding fast to her basket full of dainties for her grandmother, and Bo-Peep slept with her crook in her hand.

The children all went to bed readily enough, they were so very tired, even though they had to go in this strange array. All but the fairies--they danced and pirouetted and would not be still.

"We want to swing on the blades of grass," they kept saying, "and play hide and seek in the lily cups, and take a nap between the leaves of the roses."

The poor charwomen and coal-heavers, whose children the fairies were for the most part, stared at them in great distress. They did not know what to do with these radiant, frisky little creatures into which their Johnnys and their Pollys and Betseys were so suddenly transformed. But the fairies went to bed quietly enough when daylight came, and were soon fast asleep.

There was no further trouble till twelve o'clock, when all the children woke up. Then a great wave of alarm spread over the city. Not one of the costumes would come off then. The buttons buttoned as fast as they were unbuttoned; the pins quilted themselves in as fast as they were pulled out; and the strings flew round like lightning and twisted themselves into bow-knots as fast as they were untied.

And that was not the worst of it; every one of the children seemed to have become, in reality, the character which he or she had assumed.

The Mayor's daughter declared she was going to tend her geese out in the pasture, and the shepherdesses sprang out of their little beds of down, throwing aside their silken quilts, and cried that they must go out and watch their sheep. The princesses jumped up from their straw pallets, and wanted to go to court; and all the rest of them likewise.

Poor little Red Riding-hood sobbed and sobbed because she couldn't go and carry her basket to her grandmother, and as she didn't have any grandmother she couldn't go, of course, and her parents were very much doubled. It was all so mysterious and dreadful. The news spread very rapidly over the city, and soon a great crowd gathered around the new Costumer's shop for every one thought he must be responsible for all this mischief.

The shop door was locked; but they soon battered it down with stones. When they rushed in the Costumer was not there; he had disappeared with all his wares. Then they did not know what to do. But it was evident that they must do something before long for the state of affairs was growing worse and worse.

The Mayor's little daughter braced her back up against the tapestried wall, and planted her two feet in their thick shoes firmly. "I will go and tend my geese," she kept crying. "I won't eat my breakfast. I won't go out in the park. I won't go to school. I'm going to tend my geese--I will, I will, I will!"

And the princesses trailed their rich trains over the rough unpainted floors in their parents' poor little huts, and held their crowned heads very high and demanded to be taken to court. The princesses were mostly geese-girls when they were their proper selves, and their geese were suffering, and their poor parents did not know what they were going to do and they wrung their hands and wept as they gazed on their gorgeously apparelled children.

Finally the Mayor called a meeting of the Aldermen, and they all assembled in the City Hall. Nearly every one of them had a son or a daughter who was a chimney-sweep, or a little watch-girl, or a shepherdess. They appointed a chairman and they took a great many votes and contrary votes but they did not agree on anything, until every one proposed that they consult the Wise Woman. Then they all held up their hands, and voted to, unanimously.

So the whole board of Aldermen set out, walking by twos, with the Mayor at their head, to consult the Wise Woman. The Aldermen were all very fleshy, and carried gold-headed canes which they swung very high at

every step. They held their heads well back, and their chins stiff, and whenever they met common people they sniffed gently. They were very imposing.

The Wise Woman lived in a little hut on the outskirts of the city. She kept a Black Cat, except for her, she was all alone. She was very old, and had brought up a great many children, and she was considered remarkably wise.

But when the Aldermen reached her hut and found her seated by the fire, holding her Black Cat, a new difficulty presented itself. She had always been quite deaf and people had been obliged to scream as loud as they could in order to make her hear; but lately she had grown much deafer, and when the Aldermen attempted to lay the case before her she could not hear a word. In fact, she was so very deaf that she could not distinguish a tone below G-sharp. The Aldermen screamed till they were quite red in the faces, but all to no purpose: none of them could get up to G-sharp of course.

So the Aldermen all went back, swinging their gold-headed canes, and they had another meeting in the City Hall. Then they decided to send the highest Soprano Singer in the church choir to the Wise Woman; she could sing up to G-sharp just as easy as not. So the high Soprano Singer set out for the Wise Woman's in the Mayor's coach, and the Aldermen marched behind, swinging their gold-headed canes.

The High Soprano Singer put her head down close to the Wise Woman's ear, and sung all about the Christmas Masquerade and the dreadful dilemma everybody was in, in G-sharp--she even went higher, sometimes, and the Wise Woman heard every word.

She nodded three times, and every time she nodded she looked wiser.

"Go home, and give 'em a spoonful of castor-oil, all 'round," she piped up; then she took a pinch of snuff, and wouldn't say any more.

So the Aldermen went home, and every one took a district and marched through it, with a servant carrying an immense bowl and spoon, and every child had to take a dose of castor-oil.

But it didn't do a bit of good. The children cried and struggled when they were forced to take the castor-oil; but, two minutes afterward, the chimney-sweeps were crying for their brooms, and the princesses screaming because they couldn't go to court, and the Mayor's daughter, who had been given a double dose, cried louder and more sturdily: "I want to go and tend my geese. I will go and tend my geese."

So the Aldermen took the high Soprano Singer, and they consulted the Wise Woman again. She was taking a nap this time, and the Singer had to sing up to B-flat before she could wake her. Then she was very cross and the Black Cat put up his back and spit at the Aldermen.

"Give 'em a spanking all 'round," she snapped out, "and if that don't work put 'em to bed without their supper."

Then the Aldermen marched back to try that; and all the children in the city were spanked, and when that didn't do any good they were put to bed without any supper. But the next morning when they woke up they were worse than ever.

The Mayor and Aldermen were very indignant, and considered that they had been imposed upon and insulted. So they set out for the Wise Woman again, with the high Soprano Singer.

She sang in G-sharp how the Aldermen and the Mayor considered her an impostor, and did not think she was wise at all, and they wished her to take her Black Cat and move beyond the limits of the city.

She sang it beautifully; it sounded like the very finest Italian opera music.

"Deary me," piped the Wise Woman, when she had finished, "how very grand these gentlemen are." Her Black Cat put up his back and spit.

"Five times one Black Cat are five Black Cats," said the Wise Woman. And directly there were five Black Cats spitting and miauling.

"Five times five Black Cats are twenty-five Black Cats." And then there

were twenty-five of the angry little beasts.

"Five times twenty-five Black Cats are one hundred and twenty-five Black Cats," added the Wise Woman with a chuckle.

Then the Mayor and the Aldermen and the high Soprano Singer fled precipitately out the door and back to the city. One hundred and twenty-five Black Cats had seemed to fill the Wise Woman's hut full, and when they all spit and miauled together it was dreadful. The visitors could not wait for her to multiply Black Cats any longer.

As winter wore on and spring came, the condition of things grew more intolerable. Physicians had been consulted, who advised that the children should be allowed to follow their own bents, for fear of injury to their constitutions. So the rich Aldermen's daughters were actually out in the fields herding sheep, and their sons sweeping chimneys or carrying newspapers; and while the poor charwomen's and coal-heavers, children spent their time like princesses and fairies. Such a topsy-turvy state of society was shocking. While the Mayor's little daughter was tending geese out in the meadow like any common goose-girl, her pretty elder sister, Violetta, felt very sad about it and used often to cast about in her mind for some way of relief.

When cherries were ripe in spring, Violetta thought she would ask the Cherry-man about it. She thought the Cherry-man quite wise. He was a very pretty young fellow, and he brought cherries to sell in graceful little straw baskets lined with moss. So she stood in the kitchen door one morning and told him all about the great trouble that had come upon the city. He listened in great astonishment; he had never heard of it before. He lived several miles out in the country.

"How did the Costumer look?" he asked respectfully; he thought Violetta the most beautiful lady on earth.

Then Violetta described the Costumer, and told him of the unavailing attempts that had been made to find him. There were a great many detectives out, constantly at work.

"I know where he is!" said the Cherry-man. "He's up in one of my

cherry-trees. He's been living there ever since cherries were ripe, and he won't come down."

Then Violetta ran and told her father in great excitement, and he at once called a meeting of the Aldermen, and in a few hours half the city was on the road to the Cherry-man's.

He had a beautiful orchard of cherry-trees all laden with fruit. And, sure enough in one of the largest, way up amongst the topmost branches, sat the Costumer in his red velvet and short clothes and his diamond knee-buckles. He looked down between the green boughs. "Good-morning, friends!" he shouted.

The Aldermen shook their gold-headed canes at him, and the people danced round the tree in a rage. Then they began to climb. But they soon found that to be impossible. As fast as they touched a hand or foot to a tree, back it flew with a jerk exactly as if the tree pushed it. They tried a ladder, but the ladder fell back the moment it touched the tree, and lay sprawling upon the ground. Finally, they brought axes and thought they could chop the tree down, Costumer and all; but the wood resisted the axes as if it were iron, and only dented them, receiving no impression itself.

Meanwhile, the Costumer sat up in the tree, eating cherries and throwing the stones down. Finally he stood up on a stout branch, and, looking down, addressed the people.

"It's of no use, your trying to accomplish anything in this way," said he; "you'd better parley. I'm willing to come to terms with you, and make everything right on two conditions."

The people grew quiet then, and the Mayor stepped forward as spokesman, "Name your two conditions," said he rather testily. "You own, tacitly, that you are the cause of all this trouble."

"Well" said the Costumer, reaching out for a handful of cherries, "this Christmas Masquerade of yours was a beautiful idea; but you wouldn't do it every year, and your successors might not do it at all. I want those poor children to have a Christmas every year. My first condition is

that every poor child in the city hangs its stocking for gifts in the City Hall on every Christmas Eve, and gets it filled, too. I want the resolution filed and put away in the city archives."

"We agree to the first condition!" cried the people with one voice, without waiting for the Mayor and Aldermen.

"The second condition," said the Costumer, "is that this good young Cherry-man here has the Mayor's daughter, Violetta, for his wife. He has been kind to me, letting me live in his cherry-tree and eat his cherries and I want to reward him."

"We consent," cried all the people; but the Mayor, though he was so generous, was a proud man. "I will not consent to the second condition," he cried angrily.

"Very well," replied the Costumer, picking some more cherries, "then your youngest daughter tends geese the rest of her life, that's all."

The Mayor was in great distress; but the thought of his youngest daughter being a goose-girl all her life was too much for him. He gave in at last.

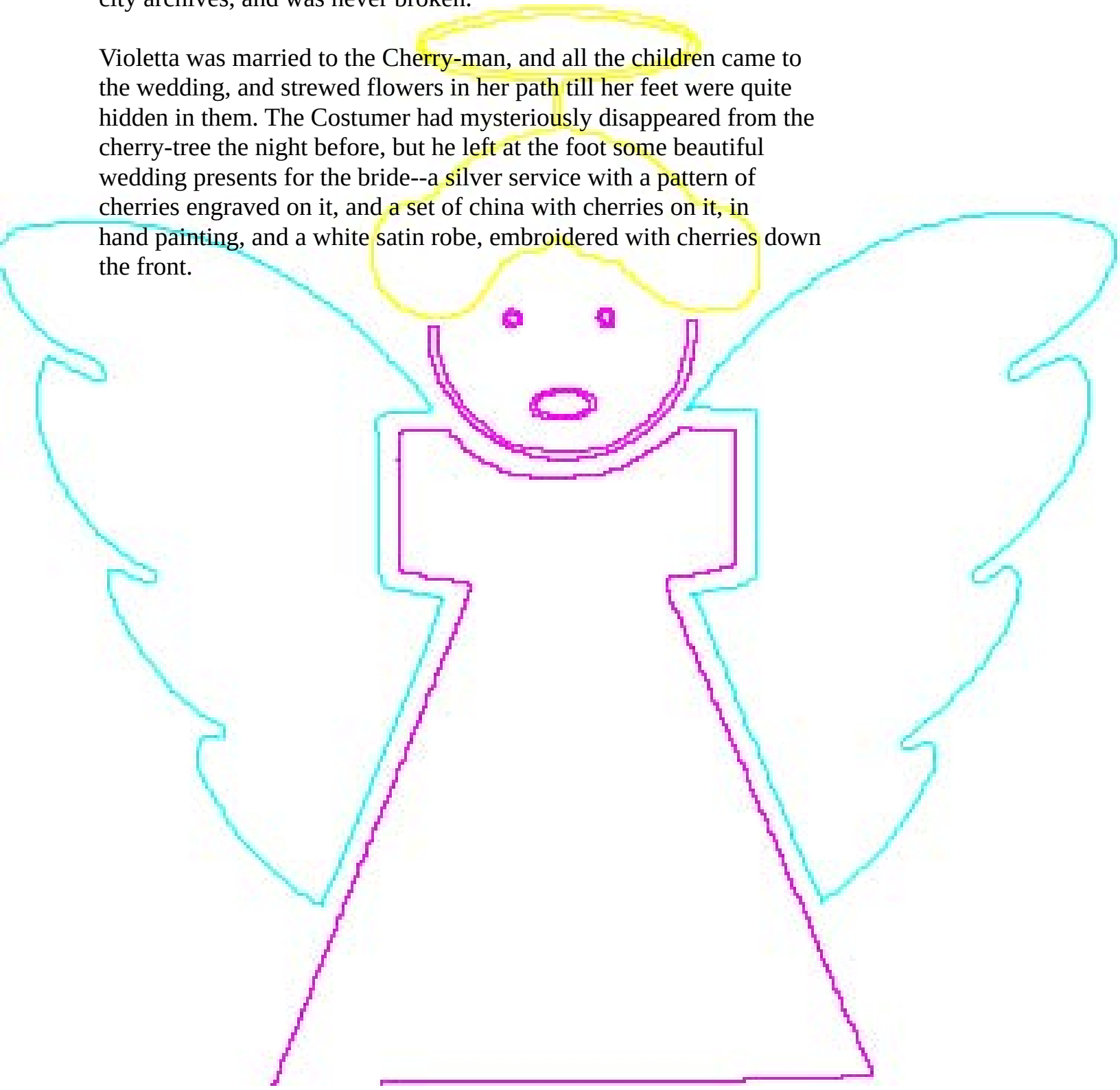
"Now go home and take the costumes off your children," said the Costumer, "and leave me in peace to eat cherries."

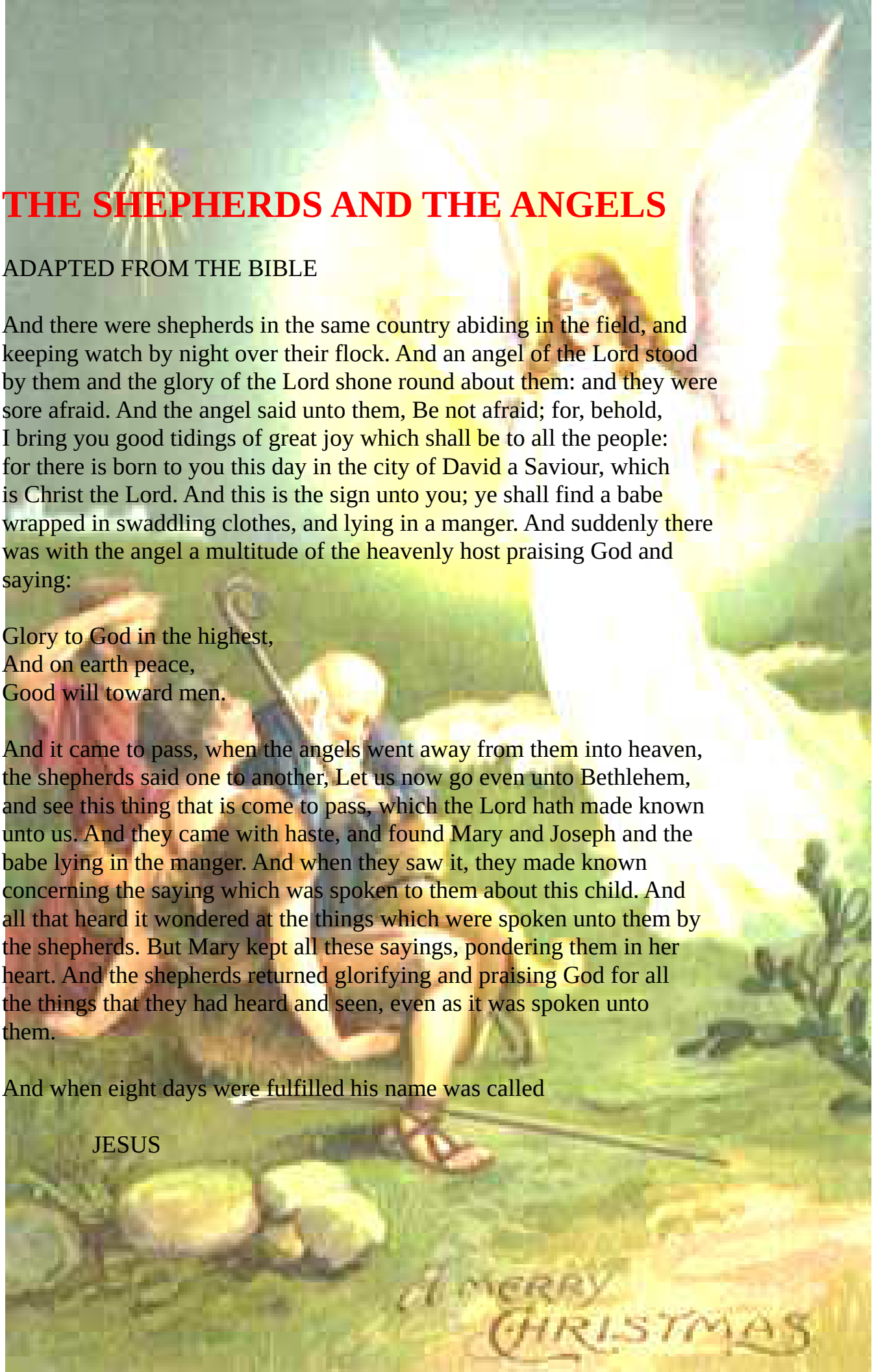
Then the people hastened back to the city, and found, to their great delight, that the costumes would come off. The pins stayed out, the buttons stayed unbuttoned, and the strings stayed untied. The children were dressed in their own proper clothes and were their own proper selves once more. The shepherdesses and the chimney-sweeps came home, and were washed and dressed in silks and velvets, and went to embroidering and playing lawn-tennis. And the princesses and the fairies put on their own suitable dresses, and went about their useful employments. There was great rejoicing in every home. Violetta thought she had never been so happy, now that her dear little sister was no longer a goose-girl, but her own dainty little lady-self.

The resolution to provide every poor child in the city with a stocking

full of gifts on Christmas was solemnly filed, and deposited in the city archives, and was never broken.

Violetta was married to the Cherry-man, and all the children came to the wedding, and strewed flowers in her path till her feet were quite hidden in them. The Costumer had mysteriously disappeared from the cherry-tree the night before, but he left at the foot some beautiful wedding presents for the bride--a silver service with a pattern of cherries engraved on it, and a set of china with cherries on it, in hand painting, and a white satin robe, embroidered with cherries down the front.





THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGELS

ADAPTED FROM THE BIBLE

And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field, and keeping watch by night over their flock. And an angel of the Lord stood by them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Be not afraid; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you; ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace,
Good will toward men.

And it came to pass, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in the manger. And when they saw it, they made known concerning the saying which was spoken to them about this child. And all that heard it wondered at the things which were spoken unto them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken unto them.

And when eight days were fulfilled his name was called

JESUS

LITTLE GIRL'S CHRISTMAS
WINNIFRED E. LINCOLN

It was Christmas Eve, and Little Girl had just hung up her stocking by the fireplace--right where it would be all ready for Santa when he slipped down the chimney. She knew he was coming, because--well, because it was Christmas Eve, and because he always had come to leave gifts for her on all the other Christmas Eves that she could remember, and because she had seen his pictures everywhere down town that afternoon when she was out with Mother.

Still, she wasn't JUST satisfied. 'Way down in her heart she was a little uncertain--you see, when you have never really and truly seen a person with your very own eyes, it's hard to feel as if you exactly believed in him--even though that person always has left beautiful gifts for you every time he has come.

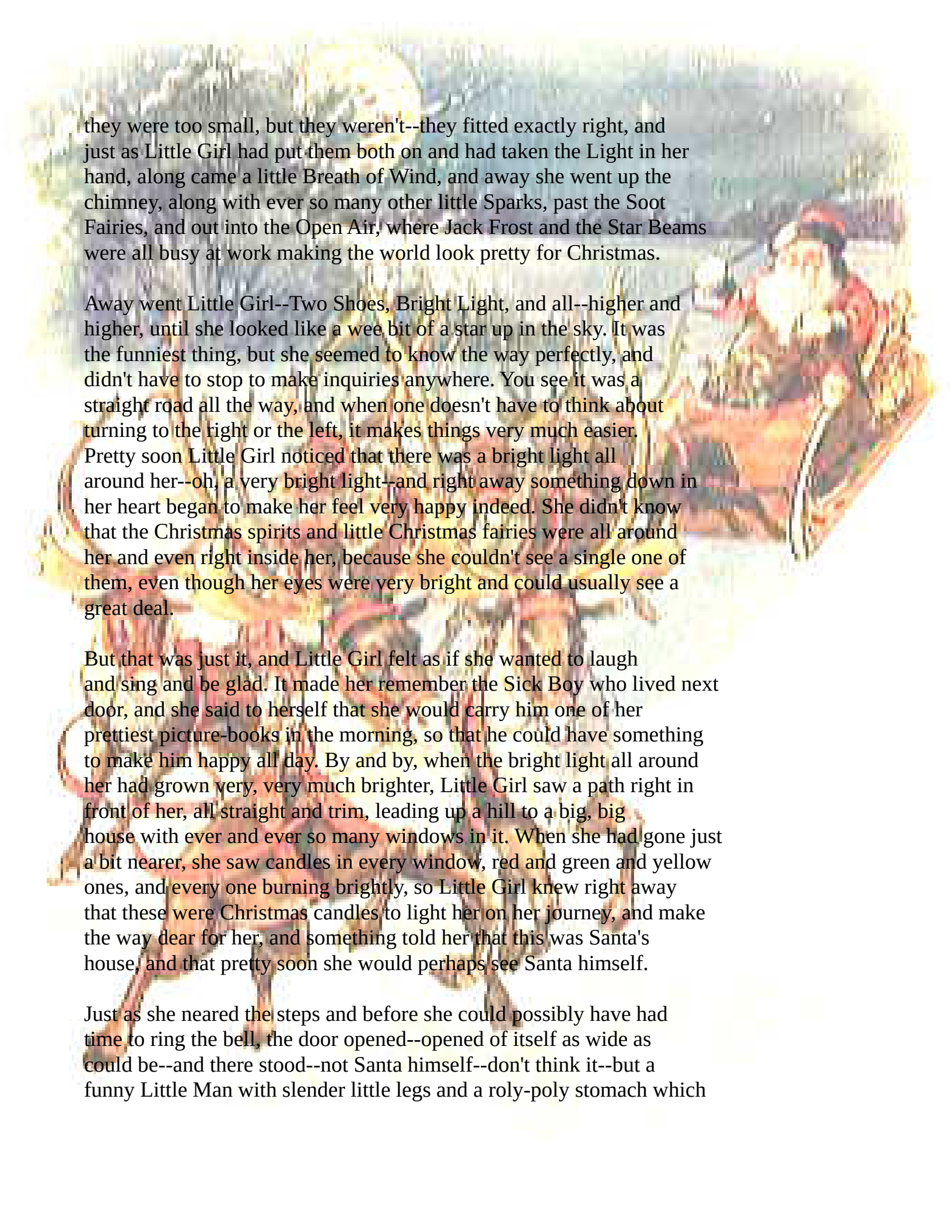
"Oh, he'll come," said Little Girl; "I just know he will be here before morning, but somehow I wish--"

"Well, what do you wish?" said a Tiny Voice close by her--so close that Little Girl fairly jumped when she heard it.

"Why, I wish I could SEE Santa myself. I'd just like to go and see his house and his workshop, and ride in his sleigh, and know Mrs. Santa--'twould be such fun, and then I'd KNOW for sure."

"Why don't you go, then?" said Tiny Voice. "It's easy enough. Just try on these Shoes, and take this Light in your hand, and you'll find your way all right."

So Little Girl looked down on the hearth, and there were two cunning little Shoes side by side, and a little Spark of a Light close to them--just as if they were all made out of one of the glowing coals of the wood-fire. Such cunning Shoes as they were--Little Girl could hardly wait to pull off her slippers and try them on. They looked as if

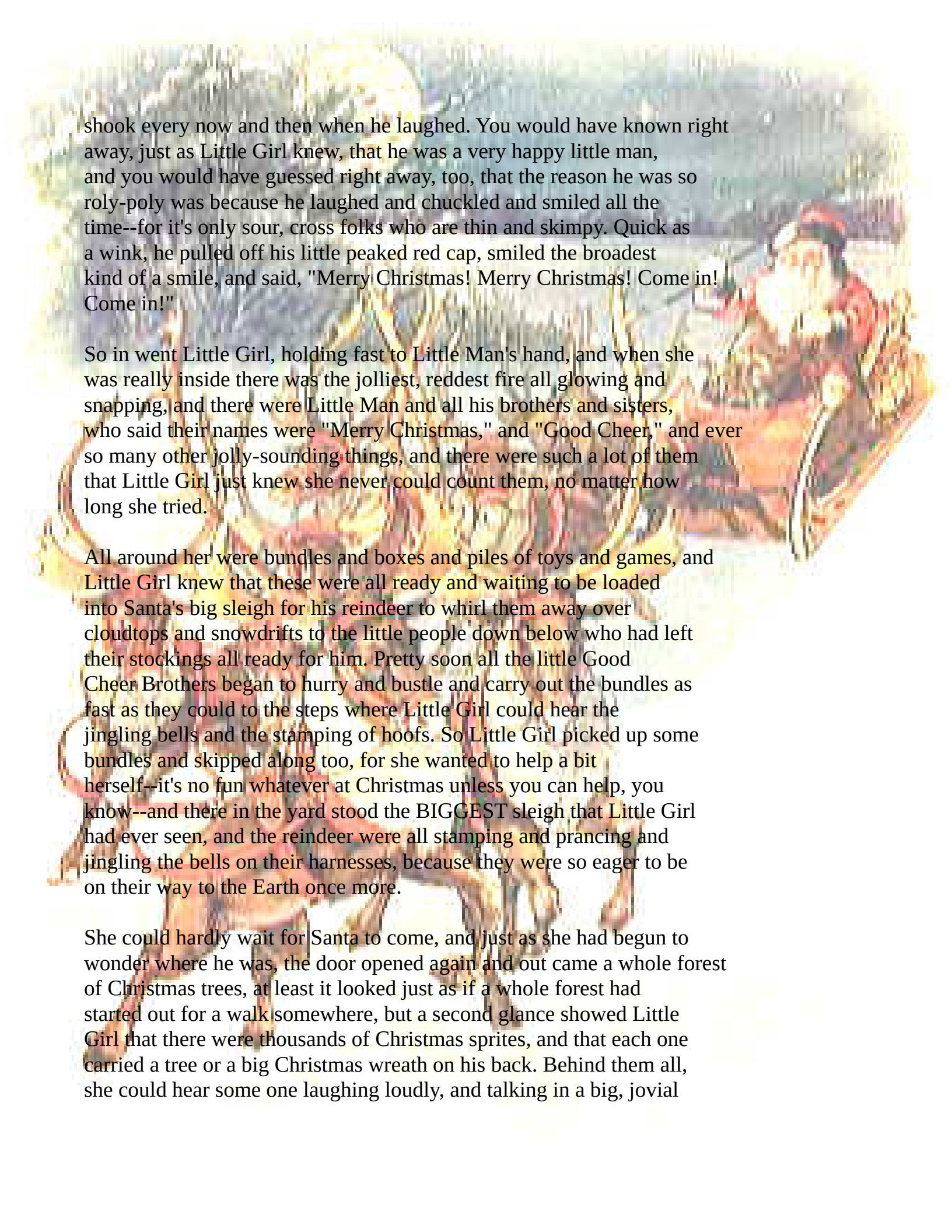


they were too small, but they weren't--they fitted exactly right, and just as Little Girl had put them both on and had taken the Light in her hand, along came a little Breath of Wind, and away she went up the chimney, along with ever so many other little Sparks, past the Soot Fairies, and out into the Open Air, where Jack Frost and the Star Beams were all busy at work making the world look pretty for Christmas.

Away went Little Girl--Two Shoes, Bright Light, and all--higher and higher, until she looked like a wee bit of a star up in the sky. It was the funniest thing, but she seemed to know the way perfectly, and didn't have to stop to make inquiries anywhere. You see it was a straight road all the way, and when one doesn't have to think about turning to the right or the left, it makes things very much easier. Pretty soon Little Girl noticed that there was a bright light all around her--oh, a very bright light--and right away something down in her heart began to make her feel very happy indeed. She didn't know that the Christmas spirits and little Christmas fairies were all around her and even right inside her, because she couldn't see a single one of them, even though her eyes were very bright and could usually see a great deal.

But that was just it, and Little Girl felt as if she wanted to laugh and sing and be glad. It made her remember the Sick Boy who lived next door, and she said to herself that she would carry him one of her prettiest picture-books in the morning, so that he could have something to make him happy all day. By and by, when the bright light all around her had grown very, very much brighter, Little Girl saw a path right in front of her, all straight and trim, leading up a hill to a big, big house with ever and ever so many windows in it. When she had gone just a bit nearer, she saw candles in every window, red and green and yellow ones, and every one burning brightly, so Little Girl knew right away that these were Christmas candles to light her on her journey, and make the way dear for her, and something told her that this was Santa's house, and that pretty soon she would perhaps see Santa himself.

Just as she neared the steps and before she could possibly have had time to ring the bell, the door opened--opened of itself as wide as could be--and there stood--not Santa himself--don't think it--but a funny Little Man with slender little legs and a roly-poly stomach which

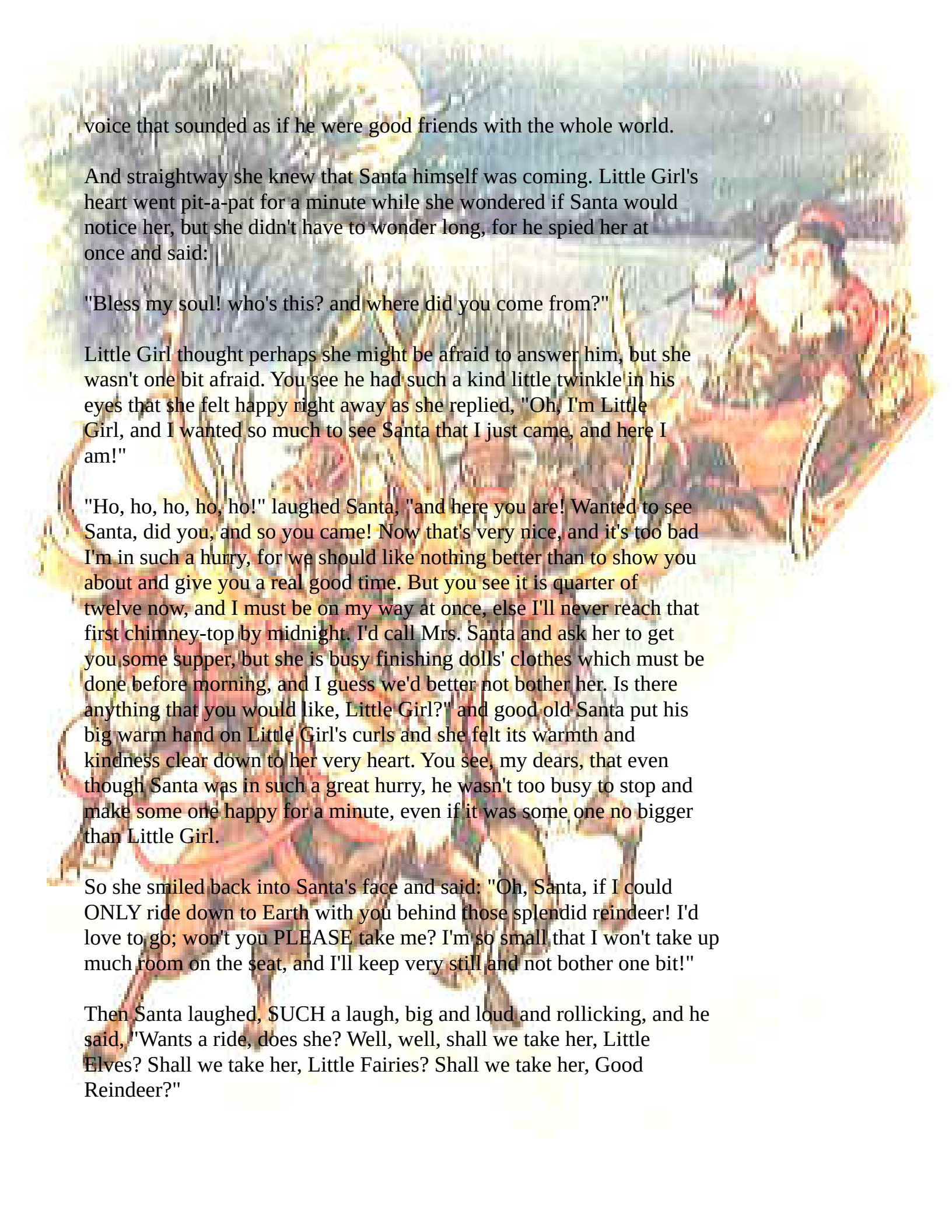


shook every now and then when he laughed. You would have known right away, just as Little Girl knew, that he was a very happy little man, and you would have guessed right away, too, that the reason he was so roly-poly was because he laughed and chuckled and smiled all the time--for it's only sour, cross folks who are thin and skimpy. Quick as a wink, he pulled off his little peaked red cap, smiled the broadest kind of a smile, and said, "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas! Come in! Come in!"

So in went Little Girl, holding fast to Little Man's hand, and when she was really inside there was the jolliest, reddest fire all glowing and snapping, and there were Little Man and all his brothers and sisters, who said their names were "Merry Christmas," and "Good Cheer," and ever so many other jolly-sounding things, and there were such a lot of them that Little Girl just knew she never could count them, no matter how long she tried.

All around her were bundles and boxes and piles of toys and games, and Little Girl knew that these were all ready and waiting to be loaded into Santa's big sleigh for his reindeer to whirl them away over cloudtops and snowdrifts to the little people down below who had left their stockings all ready for him. Pretty soon all the little Good Cheer Brothers began to hurry and bustle and carry out the bundles as fast as they could to the steps where Little Girl could hear the jingling bells and the stamping of hoofs. So Little Girl picked up some bundles and skipped along too, for she wanted to help a bit herself--it's no fun whatever at Christmas unless you can help, you know--and there in the yard stood the BIGGEST sleigh that Little Girl had ever seen, and the reindeer were all stamping and prancing and jingling the bells on their harnesses, because they were so eager to be on their way to the Earth once more.

She could hardly wait for Santa to come, and just as she had begun to wonder where he was, the door opened again and out came a whole forest of Christmas trees, at least it looked just as if a whole forest had started out for a walk somewhere, but a second glance showed Little Girl that there were thousands of Christmas sprites, and that each one carried a tree or a big Christmas wreath on his back. Behind them all, she could hear some one laughing loudly, and talking in a big, jovial



voice that sounded as if he were good friends with the whole world.

And straightway she knew that Santa himself was coming. Little Girl's heart went pit-a-pat for a minute while she wondered if Santa would notice her, but she didn't have to wonder long, for he spied her at once and said:

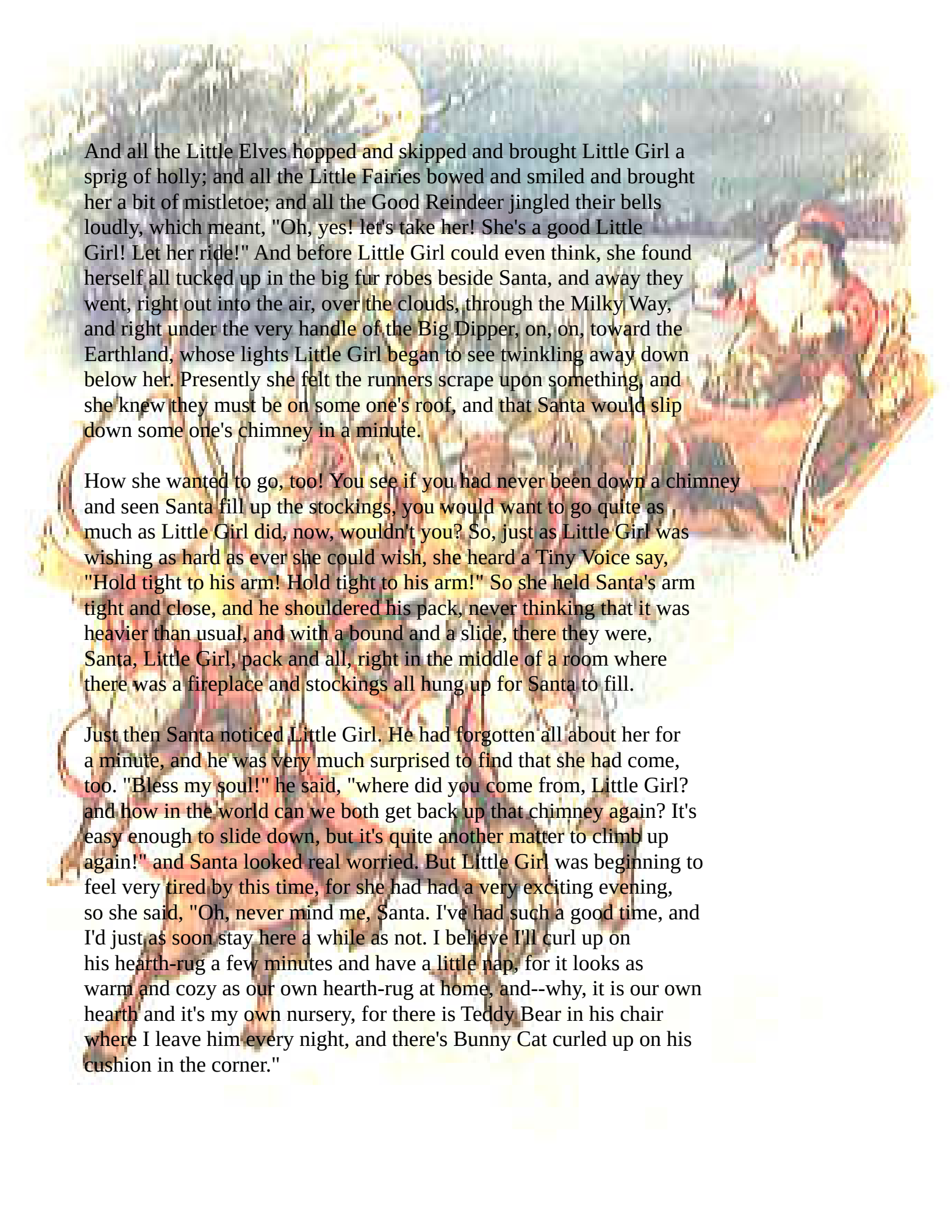
"Bless my soul! who's this? and where did you come from?"

Little Girl thought perhaps she might be afraid to answer him, but she wasn't one bit afraid. You see he had such a kind little twinkle in his eyes that she felt happy right away as she replied, "Oh, I'm Little Girl, and I wanted so much to see Santa that I just came, and here I am!"

"Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!" laughed Santa, "and here you are! Wanted to see Santa, did you, and so you came! Now that's very nice, and it's too bad I'm in such a hurry, for we should like nothing better than to show you about and give you a real good time. But you see it is quarter of twelve now, and I must be on my way at once, else I'll never reach that first chimney-top by midnight. I'd call Mrs. Santa and ask her to get you some supper, but she is busy finishing dolls' clothes which must be done before morning, and I guess we'd better not bother her. Is there anything that you would like, Little Girl?" and good old Santa put his big warm hand on Little Girl's curls and she felt its warmth and kindness clear down to her very heart. You see, my dears, that even though Santa was in such a great hurry, he wasn't too busy to stop and make some one happy for a minute, even if it was some one no bigger than Little Girl.

So she smiled back into Santa's face and said: "Oh, Santa, if I could ONLY ride down to Earth with you behind those splendid reindeer! I'd love to go; won't you PLEASE take me? I'm so small that I won't take up much room on the seat, and I'll keep very still and not bother one bit!"

Then Santa laughed, SUCH a laugh, big and loud and rollicking, and he said, "Wants a ride, does she? Well, well, shall we take her, Little Elves? Shall we take her, Little Fairies? Shall we take her, Good Reindeer?"



And all the Little Elves hopped and skipped and brought Little Girl a sprig of holly; and all the Little Fairies bowed and smiled and brought her a bit of mistletoe; and all the Good Reindeer jingled their bells loudly, which meant, "Oh, yes! let's take her! She's a good Little Girl! Let her ride!" And before Little Girl could even think, she found herself all tucked up in the big fur robes beside Santa, and away they went, right out into the air, over the clouds, through the Milky Way, and right under the very handle of the Big Dipper, on, on, toward the Earthland, whose lights Little Girl began to see twinkling away down below her. Presently she felt the runners scrape upon something, and she knew they must be on some one's roof, and that Santa would slip down some one's chimney in a minute.

How she wanted to go, too! You see if you had never been down a chimney and seen Santa fill up the stockings, you would want to go quite as much as Little Girl did, now, wouldn't you? So, just as Little Girl was wishing as hard as ever she could wish, she heard a Tiny Voice say, "Hold tight to his arm! Hold tight to his arm!" So she held Santa's arm tight and close, and he shouldered his pack, never thinking that it was heavier than usual, and with a bound and a slide, there they were, Santa, Little Girl, pack and all, right in the middle of a room where there was a fireplace and stockings all hung up for Santa to fill.

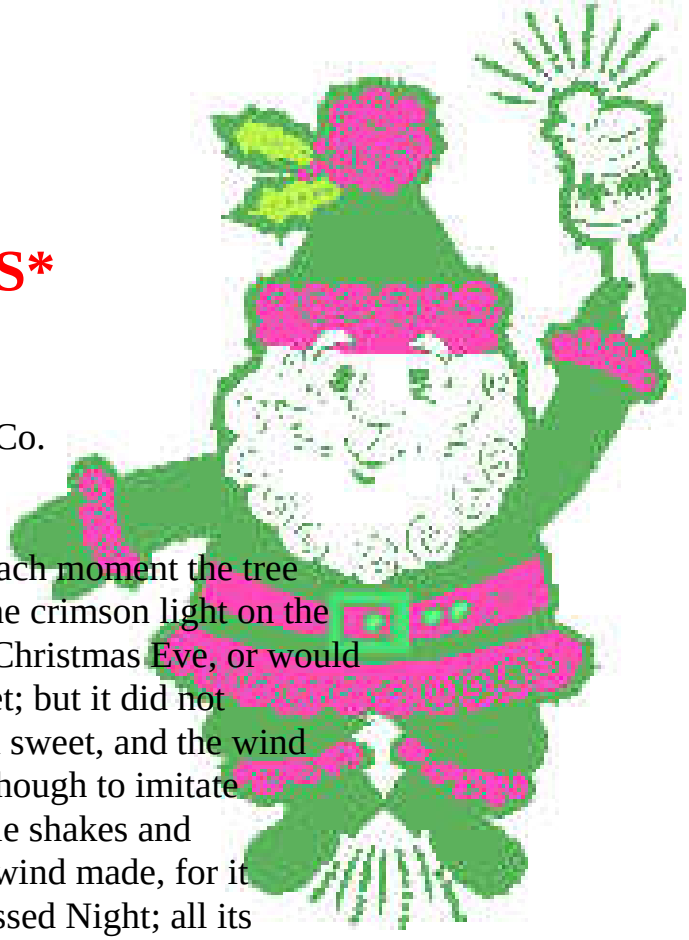
Just then Santa noticed Little Girl. He had forgotten all about her for a minute, and he was very much surprised to find that she had come, too. "Bless my soul!" he said, "where did you come from, Little Girl? and how in the world can we both get back up that chimney again? It's easy enough to slide down, but it's quite another matter to climb up again!" and Santa looked real worried. But Little Girl was beginning to feel very tired by this time, for she had had a very exciting evening, so she said, "Oh, never mind me, Santa. I've had such a good time, and I'd just as soon stay here a while as not. I believe I'll curl up on his hearth-rug a few minutes and have a little nap, for it looks as warm and cozy as our own hearth-rug at home, and--why, it is our own hearth and it's my own nursery, for there is Teddy Bear in his chair where I leave him every night, and there's Bunny Cat curled up on his cushion in the corner."

And Little Girl turned to thank Santa and say goodbye to him, but either he had gone very quickly, or else she had fallen asleep very quickly--she never could tell which--for the next thing she knew, Daddy was holding her in his arms and was saying, "What is my Little Girl doing here? She must go to bed, for it's Christmas Eve, and old Santa won't come if he thinks there are any little folks about."

But Little Girl knew better than that, and when she began to tell him all about it, and how the Christmas fairies had welcomed her, and how Santa had given her such a fine ride, Daddy laughed and laughed, and said, "You've been dreaming, Little Girl, you've been dreaming."

But Little Girl knew better than that, too, for there on the hearth was the little Black Coal, which had given her Two Shoes and Bright Light, and tight in her hand she held a holly berry which one of the Christmas Sprites had placed there. More than all that, there she was on the hearth-rug herself, just as Santa had left her, and that was the best proof of all.

The trouble was, Daddy himself had never been a Little Girl, so he couldn't tell anything about it, but we know she hadn't been dreaming, now, don't we, my dears?



TOINETTE AND THE ELVES*
SUSAN COOLIDGE

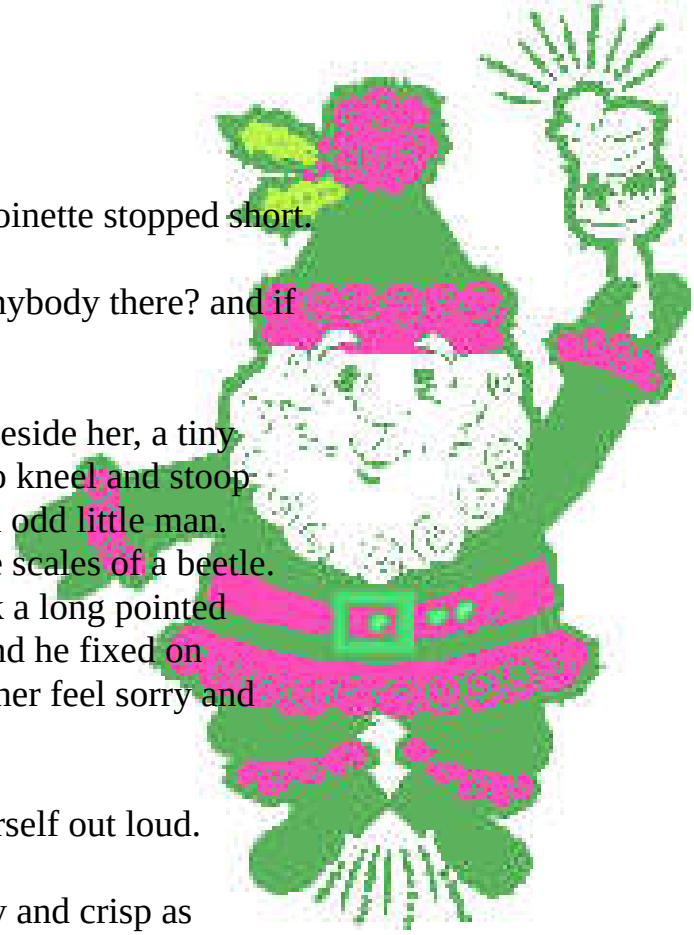
* Published by arrangement with Little, Brown & Co.

The winter's sun was nearing the horizon's edge. Each moment the tree shadows grew longer in the forest; each moment the crimson light on the upper boughs became more red and bright. It was Christmas Eve, or would be in half an hour, when the sun should be fairly set; but it did not feel like Christmas, for the afternoon was mild and sweet, and the wind in the leafless boughs sang, as it moved about, as though to imitate the vanished birds. Soft trills and whistles, odd little shakes and twitters--it was astonishing what pretty noises the wind made, for it was in good humor, as winds should be on the Blessed Night; all its storm-tones and bass-notes were for the moment laid aside, and gently as though hushing a baby to sleep, it cooed and rustled and brushed to and fro in the leafless woods.

Toinette stood, pitcher in hand, beside the well. "Wishing Well," the people called it, for they believed that if any one standing there bowed to the East, repeated a certain rhyme and wished a wish, the wish would certainly come true. Unluckily, nobody knew exactly what the rhyme should be. Toinette did not; she was wishing that she did, as she stood with her eyes fixed on the bubbling water. How nice it would be! she thought. What beautiful things should be hers, if it were only to wish and to have. She would be beautiful, rich, good--oh, so good. The children should love her dearly, and never be disagreeable. Mother should not work so hard--they should all go back to France--which mother said was si belle. Oh, dear, how nice it would be. Meantime, the sun sank lower, and mother at home was waiting for the water, but Toinette forgot that.

Suddenly she started. A low sound of crying met her ear, and something like a tiny moan. It seemed close by but she saw nothing.

Hastily she filled her pitcher and turned to go. But again the sound



came, an unmistakable sob, right under her feet. Toinette stopped short.

"What is the matter?" she called out bravely. "Is anybody there? and if there is, why don't I see you?"

A third sob--and all at once, down on the ground beside her, a tiny figure became visible, so small that Toinette had to kneel and stoop her head to see it plainly. The figure was that of an odd little man. He wore a garb of green bright and glancing as the scales of a beetle. In his mite of a hand was a cap, out of which stuck a long pointed feather. Two specks of tears stood on his cheeks and he fixed on Toinette a glance so sharp and so sad that it made her feel sorry and frightened and confused all at once.

"Why how funny this is!" she said, speaking to herself out loud.

"Not at all," replied the little man, in a voice as dry and crisp as the chirr of a grasshopper. "Anything but funny. I wish you wouldn't use such words. It hurts my feelings, Toinette."

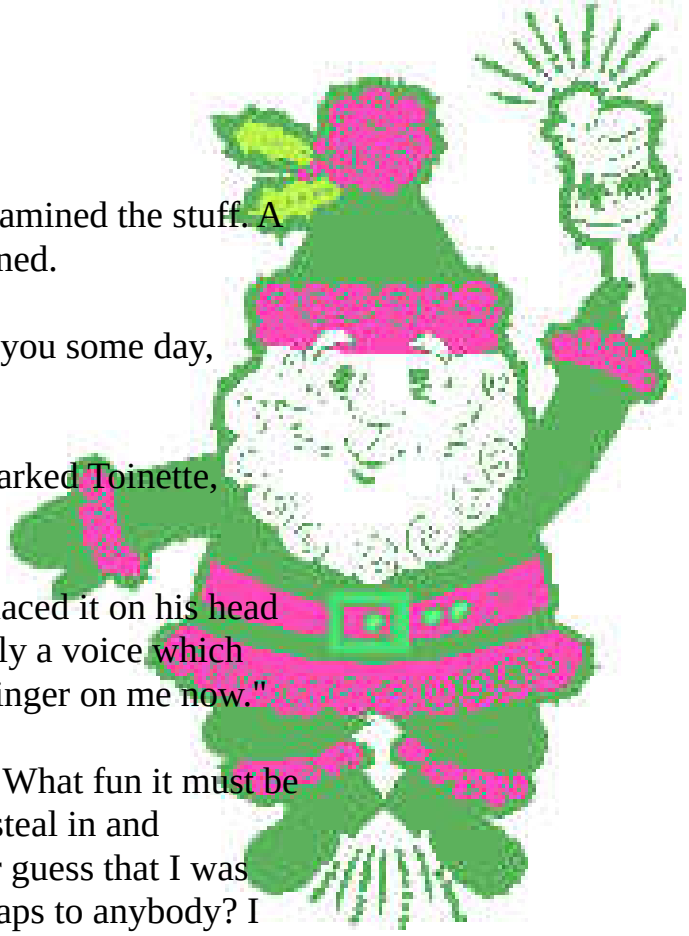
"Do you know my name, then?" cried Toinette, astonished. "That's strange. But what is the matter? Why are you crying so, little man?"

"I'm not a little man. I'm an elf," responded the dry voice; "and I think you'd cry if you had an engagement out to tea, and found yourself spiked on a great bayonet, so that you couldn't move an inch. Look!" He turned a little as he spoke and Toinette saw a long rose-thorn sticking through the back of the green robe. The little man could by no means reach the thorn, and it held him fast prisoner to the place.

"Is that all? I'll take it out for you," she said.

"Be careful--oh, be careful," entreated the little man. "This is my new dress, you know--my Christmas suit, and it's got to last a year. If there is a hole in it, Peascod will tickle me and Bean Blossom tease, till I shall wish myself dead." He stamped with vexation at the thought.

"Now, you mustn't do that," said Toinette, in a motherly tone, "else you'll tear it yourself, you know." She broke off the thorn as she



spoke, and gently drew it out. The elf anxiously examined the stuff. A tiny puncture only was visible and his face brightened.

"You're a good child," he said. "I'll do as much for you some day, perhaps."

"I would have come before if I had seen you," remarked Toinette, timidly. "But I didn't see you a bit."

"No, because I had my cap on," cried the elf. He placed it on his head as he spoke, and hey, presto! nobody was there, only a voice which laughed and said: "Well--don't stare so. Lay your finger on me now."

"Oh," said Toinette, with a gasp. "How wonderful. What fun it must be to do that. The children wouldn't see me. I should steal in and surprise them; they would go on talking, and never guess that I was there. I should so like it. Do elves ever lend their caps to anybody? I wish you'd lend me yours. It must be so nice to be invisible."

"Ho," cried the elf, appearing suddenly again. "Lend my cap, indeed! Why it wouldn't stay on the very tip of your ear, it's so small. As for nice, that depends. Sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn't. No, the only way for mortal people to be invisible is to gather the fern-seed and put it in their shoes."

"Gather it? Where? I never saw any seed to the ferns," said Toinette, staring about her.

"Of course not--we elves take care of that," replied the little man. "Nobody finds the fern-seed but ourselves. I'll tell you what, though. You were such a nice child to take out the thorn so cleverly, that I'll give you a little of the seed. Then you can try the fun of being invisible, to your heart's content."

"Will you really? How delightful. May I have it now?"

"Bless me. Do you think I carry my pockets stuffed with it?" said the elf. "Not at all. Go home, say not a word to any one, but leave your bedroom window open to night, and you'll see what you'll see."

He laid his finger on his nose as he spoke, gave a jump like a grasshopper, clapping on his cap as he went, and vanished. Toinette lingered a moment, in hopes that he might come back, then took her pitcher and hurried home. The woods were very dusky by this time; but full of her strange adventures, she did not remember to feel afraid.

"How long you have been," said her mother. "It's late for a little maid like you to be up. You must make better speed another time, my child."

Toinette pouted as she was apt to do when reproved. The children clamoured to know what had kept her, and she spoke pettishly and crossly; so that they too became cross, and presently went away into the outer kitchen to play by themselves. The children were apt to creep away when Toinette came. It made her angry and unhappy at times that they should do so, but she did not realize that it was in great part her own fault, and so did not set herself to mend it.

"Tell me a 'tory," said baby Jeanneton, creeping to her knee a little later. But Toinette's head was full of the elf; she had no time to spare for Jeanneton.

"Oh, not to-night," she replied. "Ask mother to tell you one."

"Mother's busy," said Jeanneton wistfully.

Toinette took no notice and the little one crept away disconsolately.

Bedtime at last. Toinette set the casement open, and lay a long time waiting and watching; then she fell asleep. She waked with a sneeze and jump and sat up in bed. Behold, on the coverlet stood her elfin friend, with a long train of other elves beside him, all clad in the beetle-wing green, and wearing little pointed caps. More were coming in at the window; outside a few were drifting about in the moon rays, which lit their sparkling robes till they glittered like so many fireflies. The odd thing was, that though the caps were on, Toinette could see the elves distinctly and this surprised her so much, that again she thought out loud and said, "How funny."

"You mean about the caps," replied her special elf, who seemed to have the power of reading thought.

"Yes, you can see us to-night, caps and all. Spells lose their value on Christmas Eve, always. Peascod, where is the box? Do you still wish to try the experiment of being invisible, Toinette?"

"Oh, yes--indeed I do."

"Very well; so let it be."

As he spoke he beckoned, and two elves puffing and panting like little men with a heavy load, dragged forward a droll little box about the size of a pumpkin-seed.

One of them lifted the cover.

"Pay the porter, please, ma'am," he said giving Toinette's ear a mischievous tweak with his sharp fingers.

"Hands off, you bad Peascod!" cried Toinette's elf. "This is my girl. She shan't be pinched!" He dealt Peascod a blow with his tiny hand as he spoke and looked so brave and warlike that he seemed at least an inch taller than he had before. Toinette admired him very much; and Peascod slunk away with an abashed giggle muttering that Thistle needn't be so ready with his fist.

Thistle--for thus, it seemed, Toinette's friend was named--dipped his fingers in the box, which was full of fine brown seeds, and shook a handful into each of Toinette's shoes, as they stood, toes together by the bedside.

"Now you have your wish," he said, and can go about and do what you like, no one seeing. The charm will end at sunset. Make the most of it while you can; but if you want to end it sooner, shake the seeds from the shoes and then you are just as usual."

"Oh, I shan't want to," protested Toinette; "I'm sure I shan't."

"Good-bye," said Thistle, with a mocking little laugh.

"Good-bye, and thank you ever so much," replied Toinette.

"Good-bye, good-bye," replied the other elves, in shrill chorus. They clustered together, as if in consultation; then straight out of the window they flew like a swarm of gauzy-winged bees, and melted into the moonlight. Toinette jumped up and ran to watch them but the little men were gone--not a trace of them was to be seen; so she shut the window, went back to bed and presently in the midst of her amazed and excited thoughts fell asleep.

She waked in the morning, with a queer, doubtful feeling. Had she dreamed, or had it really happened? She put on her best petticoat and laced her blue bodice; for she thought the mother would perhaps take them across the wood to the little chapel for the Christmas service. Her long hair smoothed and tied, her shoes trimly fastened, downstairs she ran. The mother was stirring porridge over the fire. Toinette went close to her, but she did not move or turn her head.

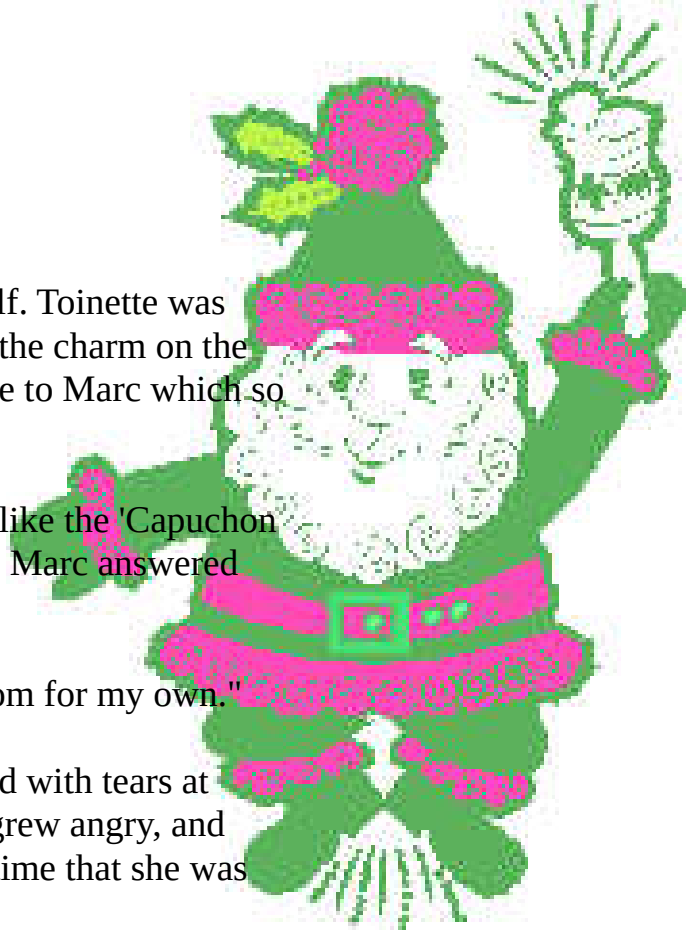
"How late the children are," she said at last, lifting the boiling pot on the hob. Then she went to the stair-foot and called, "Marc, Jeanneton, Pierre, Marie. Breakfast is ready, my children. Toinette--but where, then, is Toinette? She is used to be down long before this."

"Toinette isn't upstairs," said Marie from above.

"Her door is wide open, and she isn't there."

"That is strange," said the mother. "I have been here an hour, and she has not passed this way since." She went to the outer door and called, "Toinette! Toinette!" passing close to Toinette as she did so. And looking straight at her with unseeing eyes. Toinette, half frightened, half pleased, giggled low to herself. She really was invisible, then. How strange it seemed and what fun it was going to be.

The children sat down to breakfast, little Jeanneton, as the youngest, saying grace. The mother distributed the porridge and gave each a spoon



but she looked anxious.

"Where can Toinette have gone?" she said to herself. Toinette was conscious-pricked. She was half inclined to dispel the charm on the spot. But just then she caught a whisper from Pierre to Marc which so surprised her as to put the idea out of her head.

"Perhaps a wolf has eaten her up--a great big wolf like the 'Capuchon Rouge,' you know." This was what Pierre said; and Marc answered unfeelingly:

"If he has, I shall ask mother to let me have her room for my own."

Poor Toinette, her cheeks burned and her eyes filled with tears at this. Didn't the boys love her a bit then? Next she grew angry, and longed to box Marc's ears, only she recollected in time that she was invisible. What a bad boy he was, she thought.

The smoking porridge reminded her that she was hungry; so brushing away the tears she slipped a spoon off the table and whenever she found the chance, dipped it into the bowl for a mouthful. The porridge disappeared rapidly.

"I want some more," said Jeanneton.

"Bless me, how fast you have eaten," said the mother, turning to the bowl.

This made Toinette laugh, which shook her spoon, and a drop of the hot mixture fell right on the tip of Marie's nose as she sat with upturned face waiting her turn for a second helping. Marie gave a little scream.

"What is it?" said the mother.

"Hot water! Right in my face!" sputtered Marie.

"Water!" cried Marc. "It's porridge."

"You spattered with your spoon. Eat more carefully, my child," said the

mother, and Toinette laughed again as she heard her. After all, there was some fun in being invisible.

The morning went by. Constantly the mother went to the door, and, shading her eyes with her hand, looked out, in hopes of seeing a little figure come down the wood-path, for she thought perhaps the child went to the spring after water, and fell asleep there. The children played happily, meanwhile. They were used to doing without Toinette and did not seem to miss her, except that now and then baby Jeanneton said: "Poor Toinette gone--not here--all gone."

"Well, what if she has?" said Marc at last looking up from the wooden cup he was carving for Marie's doll. "We can play all the better."

Marc was a bold, outspoken boy, who always told his whole mind about things.

"If she were here," he went on," she'd only scold and interfere. Toinette almost always scolds. I like to have her go away. It makes it pleasanter."

"It is rather pleasanter," admitted Marie, "only I'd like her to be having a nice time somewhere else."

"Bother about Toinette," cried Pierre.

"Let's play 'My godmother has cabbage to sell.'"

I don't think Toinette had ever felt so unhappy in her life, as when she stood by unseen, and heard the children say these words. She had never meant to be unkind to them, but she was quick-tempered, dreamy, wrapped up in herself. She did not like being interrupted by them, it put her out, and she spoke sharply and was cross. She had taken it for granted that the others must love her, by a sort of right, and the knowledge that they did not grieved over very much. Creeping away, she hid herself in the woods. It was a sparkling day, but the sun did not look so bright as usual. Cuddled down under a rosebush, Toinette sat sobbing as if her heart would break at the recollection of the speeches she had overheard.

By and by a little voice within her woke up and began to make itself audible. All of us know this little voice. We call it conscience.

"Jeanneton missed me," she thought. "And, oh, dear! I pushed her away only last night and wouldn't tell her a story. And Marie hoped I was having a pleasant time somewhere. I wish I hadn't slapped Marie last Friday. And I wish I hadn't thrown Marc's ball into the fire that day I was angry with him. How unkind he was to say that--but I wasn't always kind to him. And once I said that I wished a bear would eat Pierre up. That was because he broke my cup. Oh, dear, oh, dear. What a bad girl I've been to them all."

"But you could be better and kinder if you tried, couldn't you?" said the inward voice. "I think you could."

And Toinette clasped her hands tight and said out loud: "I could. Yes--and I will."

The first thing to be done was to get rid of the fern-seed which she now regarded as a hateful thing. She untied her shoes and shook it out in the grass. It dropped and seemed to melt into the air, for it instantly vanished. A mischievous laugh sounded close behind, and a beetle-green coat-tail was visible whisking under a tuft of rushes. But Toinette had had enough of the elves, and, tying her shoes, took the road toward home, running with all her might.

"Where have you been all day, Toinette?" cried the children, as, breathless and panting, she flew in at the gate. But Toinette could not speak. She made slowly for her mother, who stood in the doorway, flung herself into her arms and burst into a passion of tears.

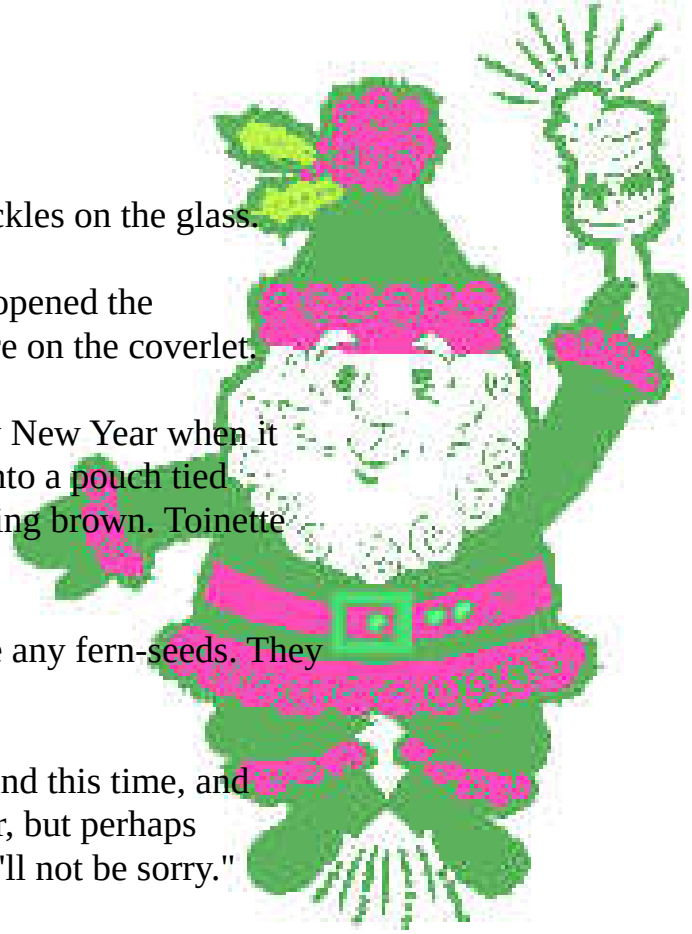
"Ma cherie, what is it, whence hast thou come?" asked the good mother alarmed. She lifted Toinette into her arms as she spoke, and hastened indoors. The other children followed, whispering and peeping, but the mother sent them away, and sitting down by the fire with Toinette in her lap, she rocked and hushed and comforted, as though Toinette had been again a little baby. Gradually the sobs ceased. For a while Toinette lay quiet, with her head on her mother's breast. Then she

wiped her wet eyes, put her arms around her mother's neck, and told her all from the very beginning, keeping not a single thing back. The dame listened with alarm.

"Saints protect us," she muttered. Then feeling Toinette's hands and head, "Thou hast a fever," she said. "I will make thee a tisane, my darling, and thou must at once go to bed." Toinette vainly protested; to bed she went and perhaps it was the wisest thing, for the warm drink threw her into a long sound sleep and when she woke she was herself again, bright and well, hungry for dinner, and ready to do her usual tasks.

Herself--but not quite the same Toinette that she had been before. Nobody changes from bad to better in a minute. It takes time for that, time and effort, and a long struggle with evil habits and tempers. But there is sometimes a certain minute or day in which people begin to change, and thus it was with Toinette. The fairy lesson was not lost upon her. She began to fight with herself, to watch her faults and try to conquer them. It was hard work; often she felt discouraged, but she kept on. Week after week and month after month she grew less selfish, kinder, more obliging than she used to be. When she failed and her old fractious temper got the better of her, she was sorry and begged every one's pardon so humbly that they could not but forgive. The mother began to think that the elves really had bewitched her child. As for the children they learned to love Toinette as never before, and came to her with all their pains and pleasures, as children should to a kind older sister. Each fresh proof of this, every kiss from Jeanneton, every confidence from Marc, was a comfort to Toinette, for she never forgot Christmas Day, and felt that no trouble was too much to wipe out that unhappy recollection. "I think they like me better than they did then," she would say; but then the thought came, "Perhaps if I were invisible again, if they did not know I was there, I might hear something to make me feel as badly as I did that morning." These sad thoughts were part of the bitter fruit of the fairy fern-seed.

So with doubts and fears the year went by, and again it was Christmas Eve. Toinette had been asleep some hours when she was roused by a sharp tapping at the window pane. Startled, and only half awake, she sat up in bed and saw by the moonlight a tiny figure outside which she



recognized. It was Thistle drumming with his knuckles on the glass.

"Let me in," cried the dry little voice. So Toinette opened the casement, and Thistle flew in and perched as before on the coverlet.

"Merry Christmas, my girl." he said, "and a Happy New Year when it comes. I've brought you a present;" and, dipping into a pouch tied round his waist, he pulled out a handful of something brown. Toinette knew what it was in a moment.

"Oh, no," she cried shrinking back. "Don't give me any fern-seeds. They frighten me. I don't like them."

"Don't be silly," said Thistle, his voice sounding kind this time, and earnest. "It wasn't pleasant being invisible last year, but perhaps this year it will be. Take my advice, and try it. You'll not be sorry."

"Sha'n't I?" said Toinette, brightening. "Very well, then, I will." She leaned out of bed, and watched Thistle strew the fine dustlike grains in each shoe.

"I'll drop in to-morrow night, and just see how you like it," he said. Then, with a nod, he was gone.

The old fear came back when she woke in the morning, and she tied on her shoes with a tremble at her heart. Downstairs she stole. The first thing she saw was a wooden ship standing on her plate. Marc had made the ship, but Toinette had no idea it was for her.

The little ones sat round the table with their eyes on the door, watching till Toinette should come in and be surprised.

"I wish she'd hurry," said Pierre, drumming on his bowl with a spoon.

"We all want Toinette, don't we?" said the mother, smiling as she poured the hot porridge.

"It will be fun to see her stare," declared Marc.

"Toinette is jolly when she stares. Her eyes look big and her cheeks grow pink. Andre Brugen thinks his sister Aline is prettiest, but I don't. Our Toinette is ever so pretty."

"She is ever so nice, too," said Pierre. "She's as good to play with as--as--a boy," finished triumphantly.

"Oh, I wish my Toinette would come," said Jeanneton.

Toinette waited no longer, but sped upstairs with glad tears in her eyes. Two minutes, and down she came again visible this time. Her heart was light as a feather.

"Merry Christmas!" clamoured the children. The ship was presented, Toinette was duly surprised, and so the happy day began.

That night Toinette left the window open, and lay down in her clothes; for she felt, as Thistle had been so kind, she ought to receive him politely. He came at midnight, and with him all the other little men in green.

"Well, how was it?" asked Thistle.

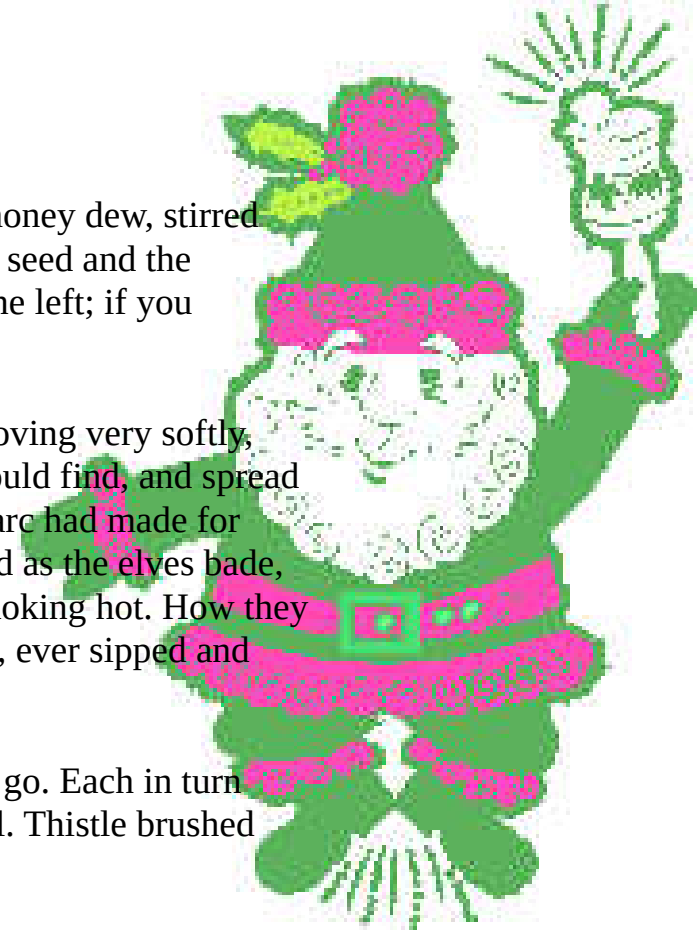
"Oh, I liked it this time," declared Toinette, with shining eyes, "and I thank you so much."

"I'm glad you did," said the elf. "And I'm glad you are thankful, for we want you to do something for us."

"What can it be?" inquired Toinette, wondering.

"You must know," went on Thistle, "that there is no dainty in the world which we elves enjoy like a bowl of fern-seed broth. But it has to be cooked over a real fire, and we dare not go near fire, you know, lest our wings scorch. So we seldom get any fern-seed broth. Now, Toinette, will you make us some?"

"Indeed, I will!" cried Toinette, "only you must tell me how."

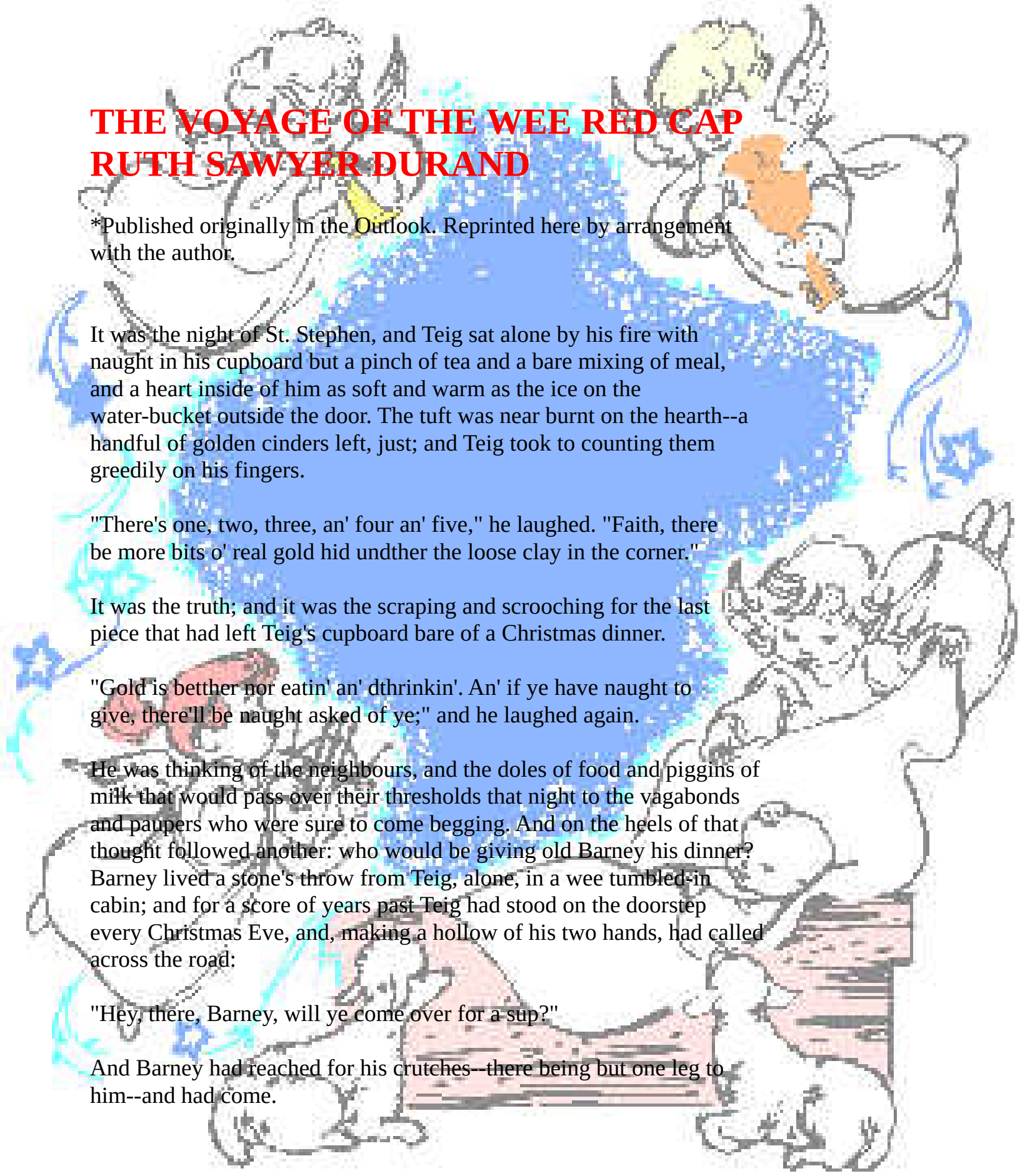


"It is very simple," said Peascod; "only seed and honey dew, stirred from left to right with a sprig of fennel. Here's the seed and the fennel, and here's the dew. Be sure and stir from the left; if you don't, it curdles, and the flavour will be spoiled."

Down into the kitchen they went, and Toinette, moving very softly, quickened the fire, set on the smallest bowl she could find, and spread the doll's table with the wooden saucers which Marc had made for Jeanneton to play with. Then she mixed and stirred as the elves bade, and when the soup was done, served it to them smoking hot. How they feasted! No bumblebee, dipping into a flower-cup, ever sipped and twinkled more rapturously than they.

When the last drop was eaten, they made ready to go. Each in turn kissed Toinette's hand, and said a word of farewell. Thistle brushed his feathered cap over the doorpost as he passed.

"Be lucky, house," he said, "for you have received and entertained the luck-bringers. And be lucky, Toinette. Good temper is good luck, and sweet words and kind looks and peace in the heart are the fairest of fortunes. See that you never lose them again, my girl." With this, he, too, kissed Toinette's hand, waved his feathered cap, and--whir! they all were gone, while Toinette, covering the fire with ashes and putting aside the little cups, stole up to her bed a happy child.



THE VOYAGE OF THE WEE RED CAP
RUTH SAWYER DURAND

*Published originally in the Outlook. Reprinted here by arrangement with the author.

It was the night of St. Stephen, and Teig sat alone by his fire with naught in his cupboard but a pinch of tea and a bare mixing of meal, and a heart inside of him as soft and warm as the ice on the water-bucket outside the door. The tuft was near burnt on the hearth--a handful of golden cinders left, just; and Teig took to counting them greedily on his fingers.

"There's one, two, three, an' four an' five," he laughed. "Faith, there be more bits o' real gold hid undther the loose clay in the corner."

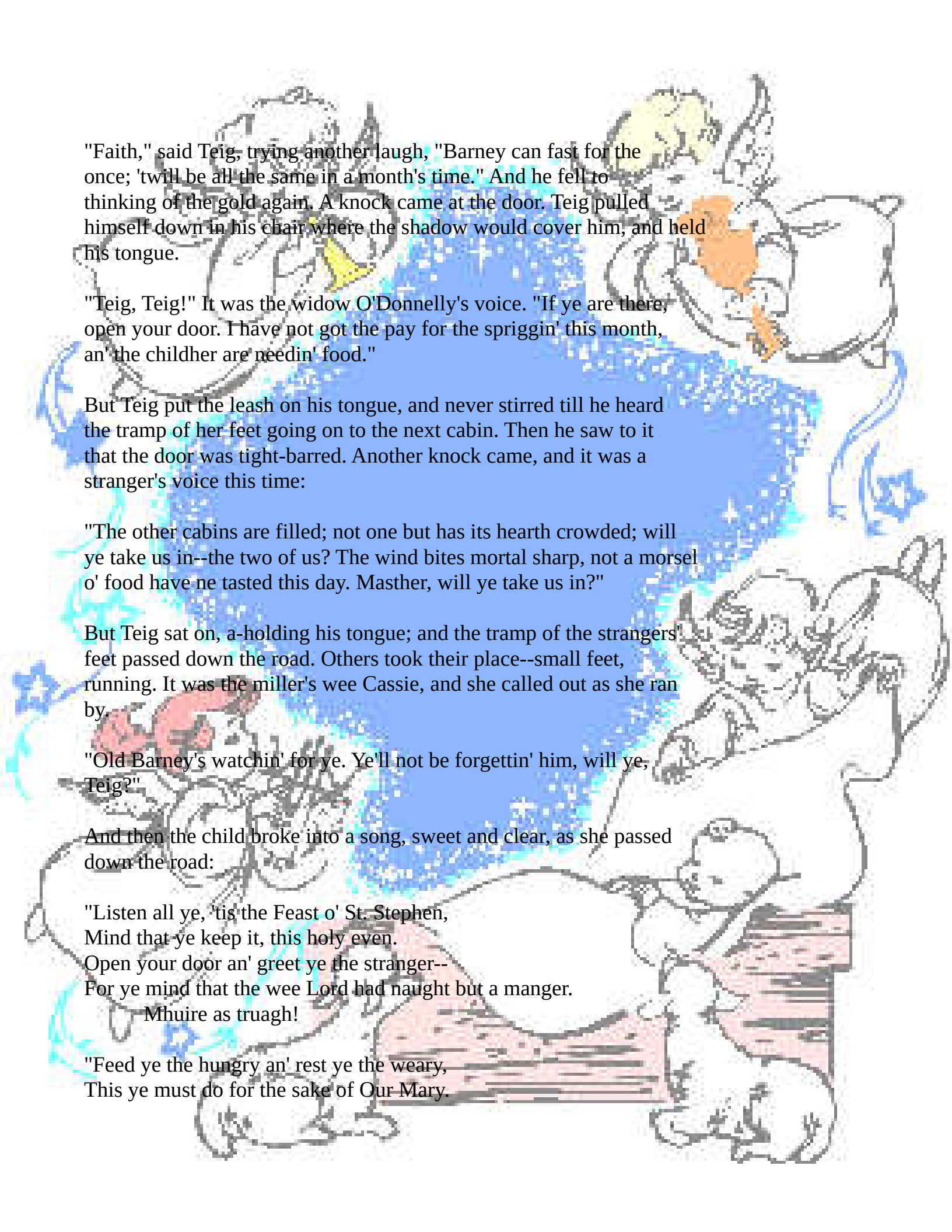
It was the truth; and it was the scraping and scrooching for the last piece that had left Teig's cupboard bare of a Christmas dinner.

"Gold is betther nor eatin' an' dthrinkin'. An' if ye have naught to give, there'll be naught asked of ye;" and he laughed again.

He was thinking of the neighbours, and the doles of food and piggins of milk that would pass over their thresholds that night to the vagabonds and paupers who were sure to come begging. And on the heels of that thought followed another: who would be giving old Barney his dinner? Barney lived a stone's throw from Teig, alone, in a wee tumbled-in cabin; and for a score of years past Teig had stood on the doorstep every Christmas Eve, and, making a hollow of his two hands, had called across the road:

"Hey, there, Barney, will ye come over for a sup?"

And Barney had reached for his crutches--there being but one leg to him--and had come.



"Faith," said Teig, trying another laugh, "Barney can fast for the once; 'twill be all the same in a month's time." And he fell to thinking of the gold again. A knock came at the door. Teig pulled himself down in his chair where the shadow would cover him, and held his tongue.

"Teig, Teig!" It was the widow O'Donnelly's voice. "If ye are there, open your door. I have not got the pay for the spriggin' this month, an' the childher are needin' food."

But Teig put the leash on his tongue, and never stirred till he heard the tramp of her feet going on to the next cabin. Then he saw to it that the door was tight-barred. Another knock came, and it was a stranger's voice this time:

"The other cabins are filled; not one but has its hearth crowded; will ye take us in--the two of us? The wind bites mortal sharp, not a morsel o' food have ne tasted this day. Masther, will ye take us in?"

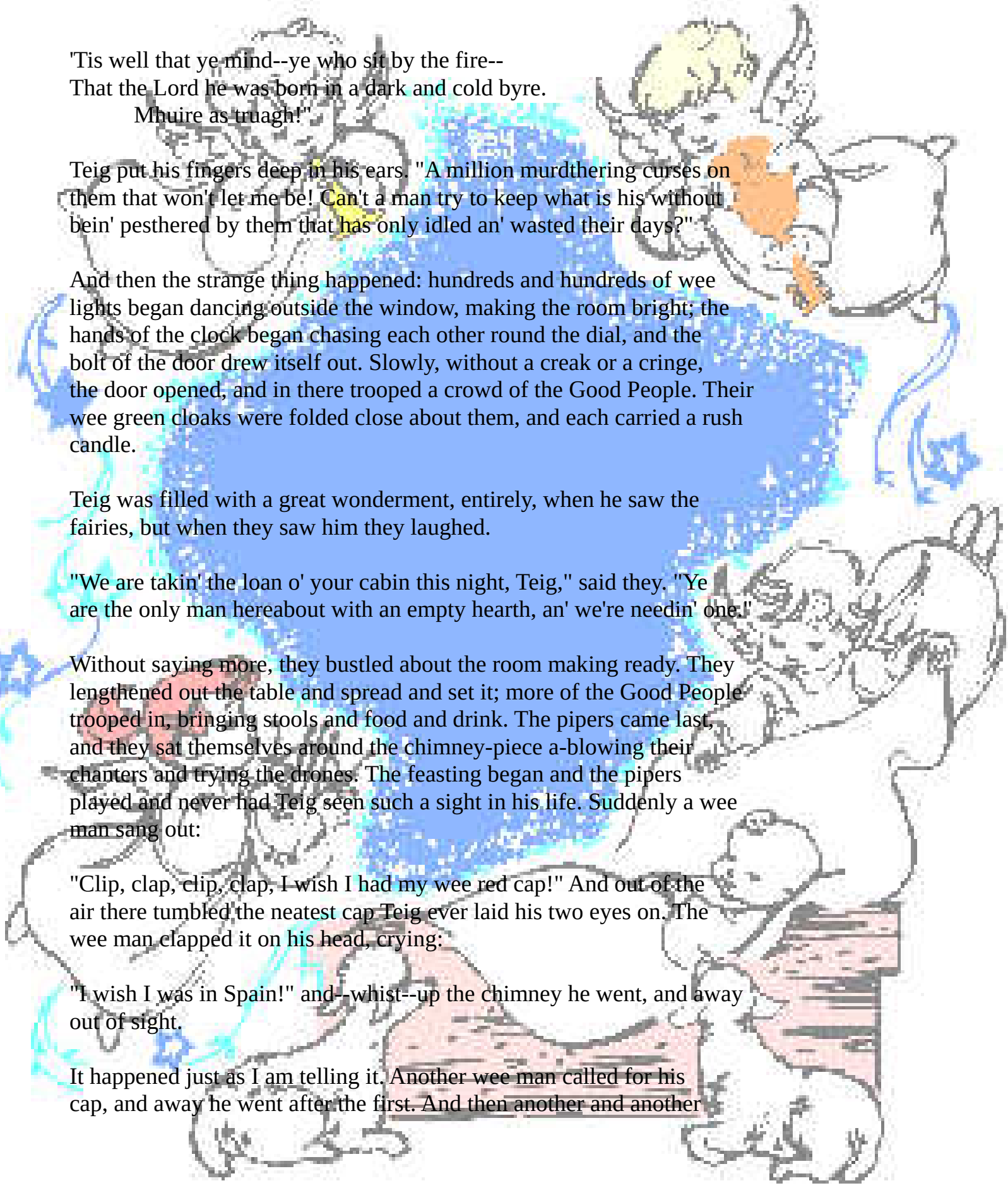
But Teig sat on, a-holding his tongue; and the tramp of the strangers' feet passed down the road. Others took their place--small feet, running. It was the miller's wee Cassie, and she called out as she ran by.

"Old Barney's watchin' for ye. Ye'll not be forgettin' him, will ye, Teig?"

And then the child broke into a song, sweet and clear, as she passed down the road:

"Listen all ye, 'tis the Feast o' St. Stephen,
Mind that ye keep it, this holy even.
Open your door an' greet ye the stranger--
For ye mind that the wee Lord had naught but a manger.
Mhuire as truagh!

"Feed ye the hungry an' rest ye the weary,
This ye must do for the sake of Our Mary.



'Tis well that ye mind--ye who sit by the fire--
That the Lord he was born in a dark and cold byre.
Mhuire as truagh!"

Teig put his fingers deep in his ears. "A million murdthering curses on them that won't let me be! Can't a man try to keep what is his without bein' pesthered by them that has only idled an' wasted their days?"

And then the strange thing happened: hundreds and hundreds of wee lights began dancing outside the window, making the room bright; the hands of the clock began chasing each other round the dial, and the bolt of the door drew itself out. Slowly, without a creak or a cringe, the door opened, and in there trooped a crowd of the Good People. Their wee green cloaks were folded close about them, and each carried a rush candle.

Teig was filled with a great wonderment, entirely, when he saw the fairies, but when they saw him they laughed.

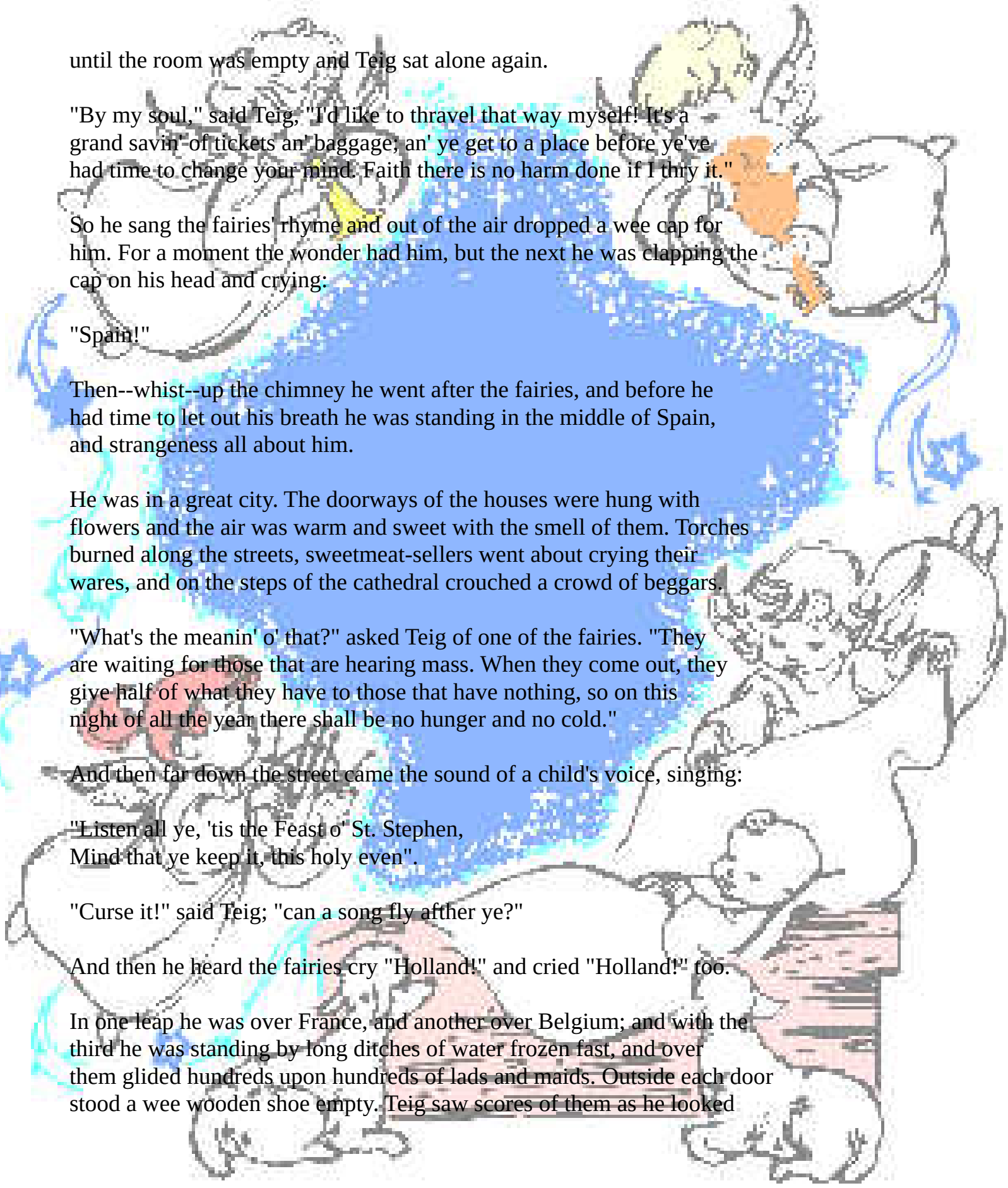
"We are takin' the loan o' your cabin this night, Teig," said they. "Ye are the only man hereabout with an empty hearth, an' we're needin' one."

Without saying more, they bustled about the room making ready. They lengthened out the table and spread and set it; more of the Good People trooped in, bringing stools and food and drink. The pipers came last, and they sat themselves around the chimney-piece a-blowing their chanters and trying the drones. The feasting began and the pipers played and never had Teig seen such a sight in his life. Suddenly a wee man sang out:

"Clip, clap, clip, clap, I wish I had my wee red cap!" And out of the air there tumbled the neatest cap Teig ever laid his two eyes on. The wee man clapped it on his head, crying:

"I wish I was in Spain!" and--whist--up the chimney he went, and away out of sight.

It happened just as I am telling it. Another wee man called for his cap, and away he went after the first. And then another and another



until the room was empty and Teig sat alone again.

"By my soul," said Teig, "I'd like to thravel that way myself! It's a grand savin' of tickets an' baggage; an' ye get to a place before ye've had time to change your mind. Faith there is no harm done if I thry it."

So he sang the fairies' rhyme and out of the air dropped a wee cap for him. For a moment the wonder had him, but the next he was clapping the cap on his head and crying:

"Spain!"

Then--whist--up the chimney he went after the fairies, and before he had time to let out his breath he was standing in the middle of Spain, and strangeness all about him.

He was in a great city. The doorways of the houses were hung with flowers and the air was warm and sweet with the smell of them. Torches burned along the streets, sweetmeat-sellers went about crying their wares, and on the steps of the cathedral crouched a crowd of beggars.

"What's the meanin' o' that?" asked Teig of one of the fairies. "They are waiting for those that are hearing mass. When they come out, they give half of what they have to those that have nothing, so on this night of all the year there shall be no hunger and no cold."

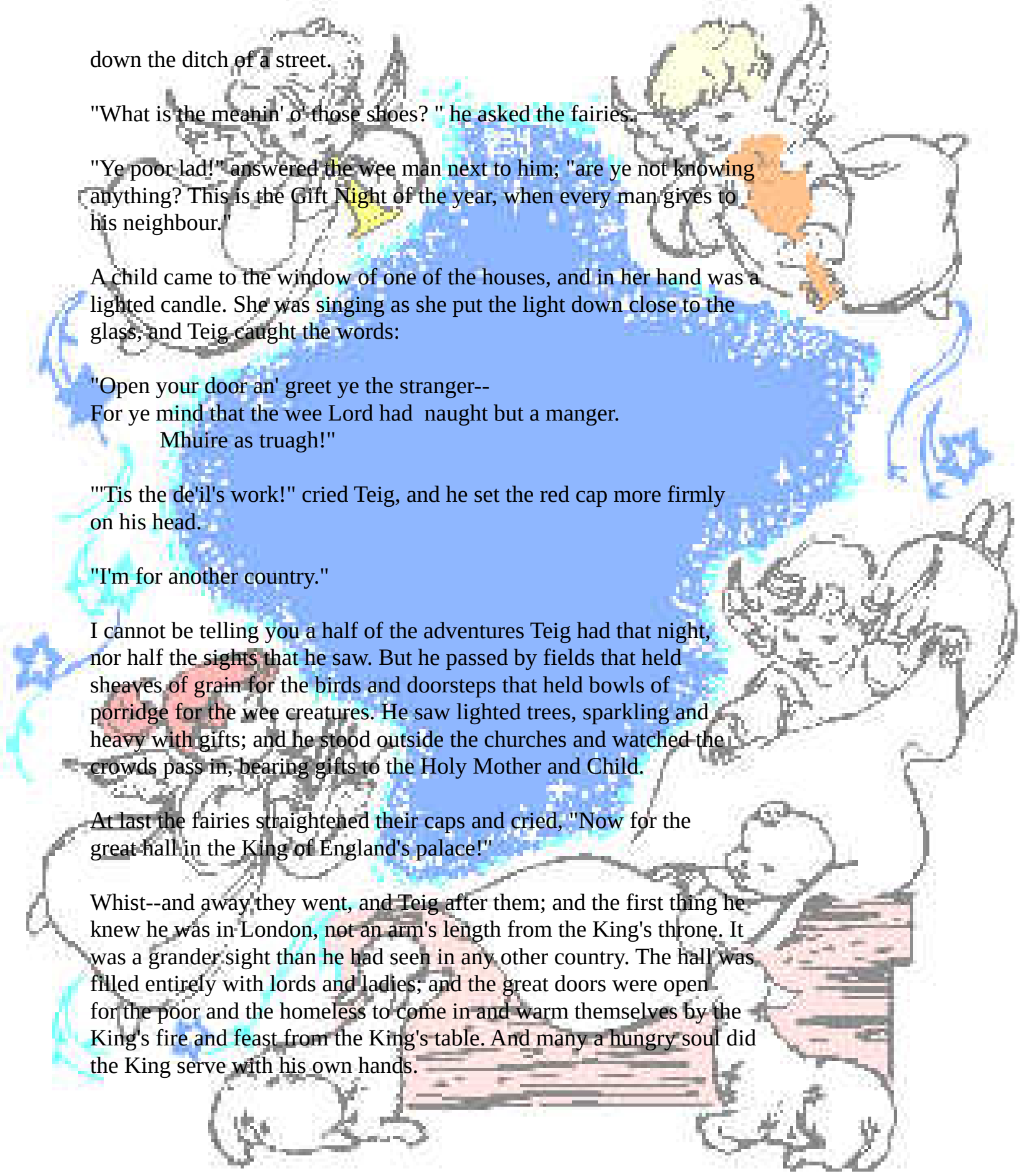
And then far down the street came the sound of a child's voice, singing:

"Listen all ye, 'tis the Feast o' St. Stephen,
Mind that ye keep it, this holy even".

"Curse it!" said Teig; "can a song fly afther ye?"

And then he heard the fairies cry "Holland!" and cried "Holland!" too.

In one leap he was over France, and another over Belgium; and with the third he was standing by long ditches of water frozen fast, and over them glided hundreds upon hundreds of lads and maids. Outside each door stood a wee wooden shoe empty. Teig saw scores of them as he looked



down the ditch of a street.

"What is the meanin' o' those shoes? " he asked the fairies.

"Ye poor lad!" answered the wee man next to him; "are ye not knowing anything? This is the Gift Night of the year, when every man gives to his neighbour."

A child came to the window of one of the houses, and in her hand was a lighted candle. She was singing as she put the light down close to the glass, and Teig caught the words:

"Open your door an' greet ye the stranger--
For ye mind that the wee Lord had naught but a manger.
Mhuire as truagh!"

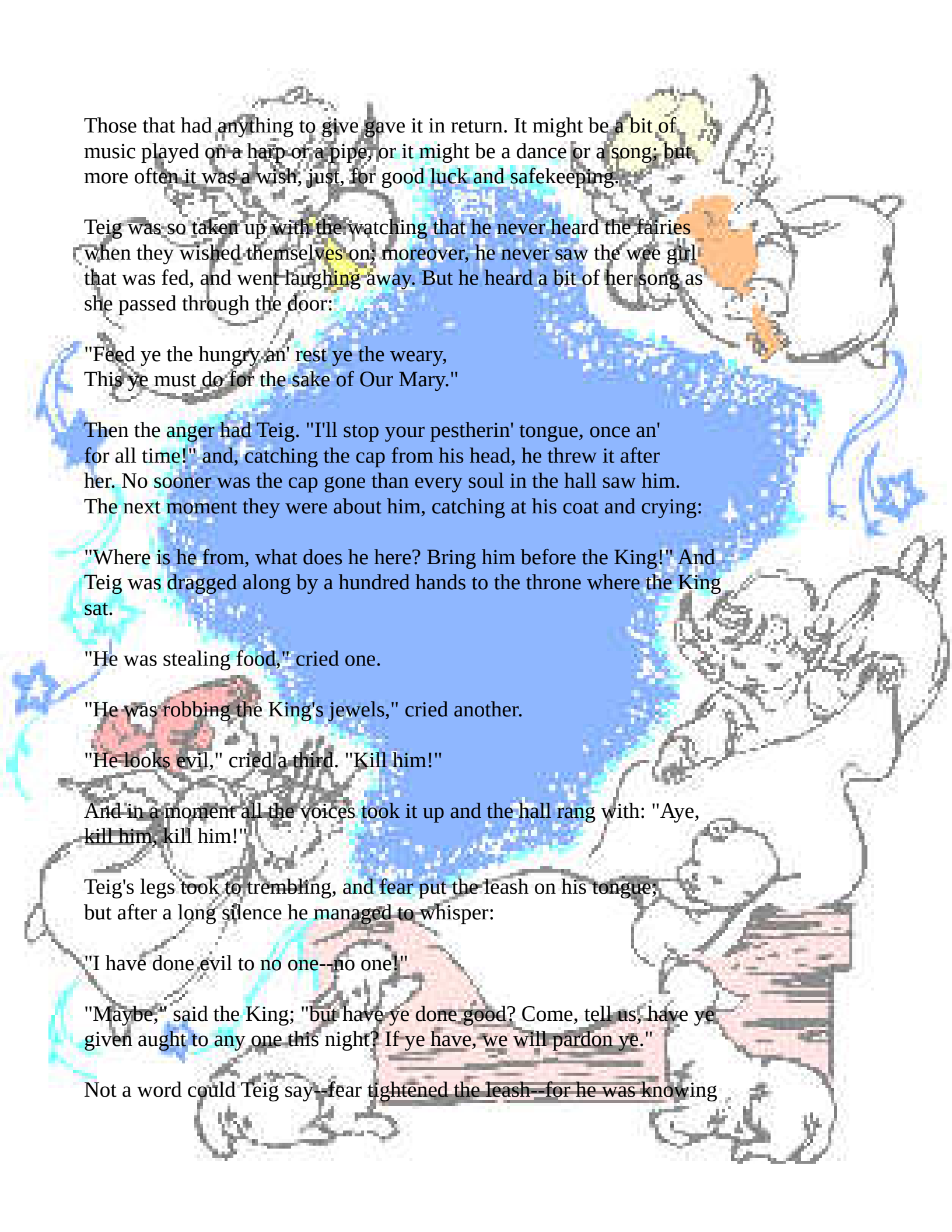
"'Tis the de'il's work!" cried Teig, and he set the red cap more firmly on his head.

"I'm for another country."

I cannot be telling you a half of the adventures Teig had that night, nor half the sights that he saw. But he passed by fields that held sheaves of grain for the birds and doorsteps that held bowls of porridge for the wee creatures. He saw lighted trees, sparkling and heavy with gifts; and he stood outside the churches and watched the crowds pass in, bearing gifts to the Holy Mother and Child.

At last the fairies straightened their caps and cried, "Now for the great hall in the King of England's palace!"

Whist--and away they went, and Teig after them; and the first thing he knew he was in London, not an arm's length from the King's throne. It was a grander sight than he had seen in any other country. The hall was filled entirely with lords and ladies; and the great doors were open for the poor and the homeless to come in and warm themselves by the King's fire and feast from the King's table. And many a hungry soul did the King serve with his own hands.



Those that had anything to give gave it in return. It might be a bit of music played on a harp or a pipe, or it might be a dance or a song; but more often it was a wish, just, for good luck and safekeeping.

Teig was so taken up with the watching that he never heard the fairies when they wished themselves on; moreover, he never saw the wee girl that was fed, and went laughing away. But he heard a bit of her song as she passed through the door:

"Feed ye the hungry an' rest ye the weary,
This ye must do for the sake of Our Mary."

Then the anger had Teig. "I'll stop your pestherin' tongue, once an' for all time!" and, catching the cap from his head, he threw it after her. No sooner was the cap gone than every soul in the hall saw him. The next moment they were about him, catching at his coat and crying:

"Where is he from, what does he here? Bring him before the King!" And Teig was dragged along by a hundred hands to the throne where the King sat.

"He was stealing food," cried one.

"He was robbing the King's jewels," cried another.

"He looks evil," cried a third. "Kill him!"

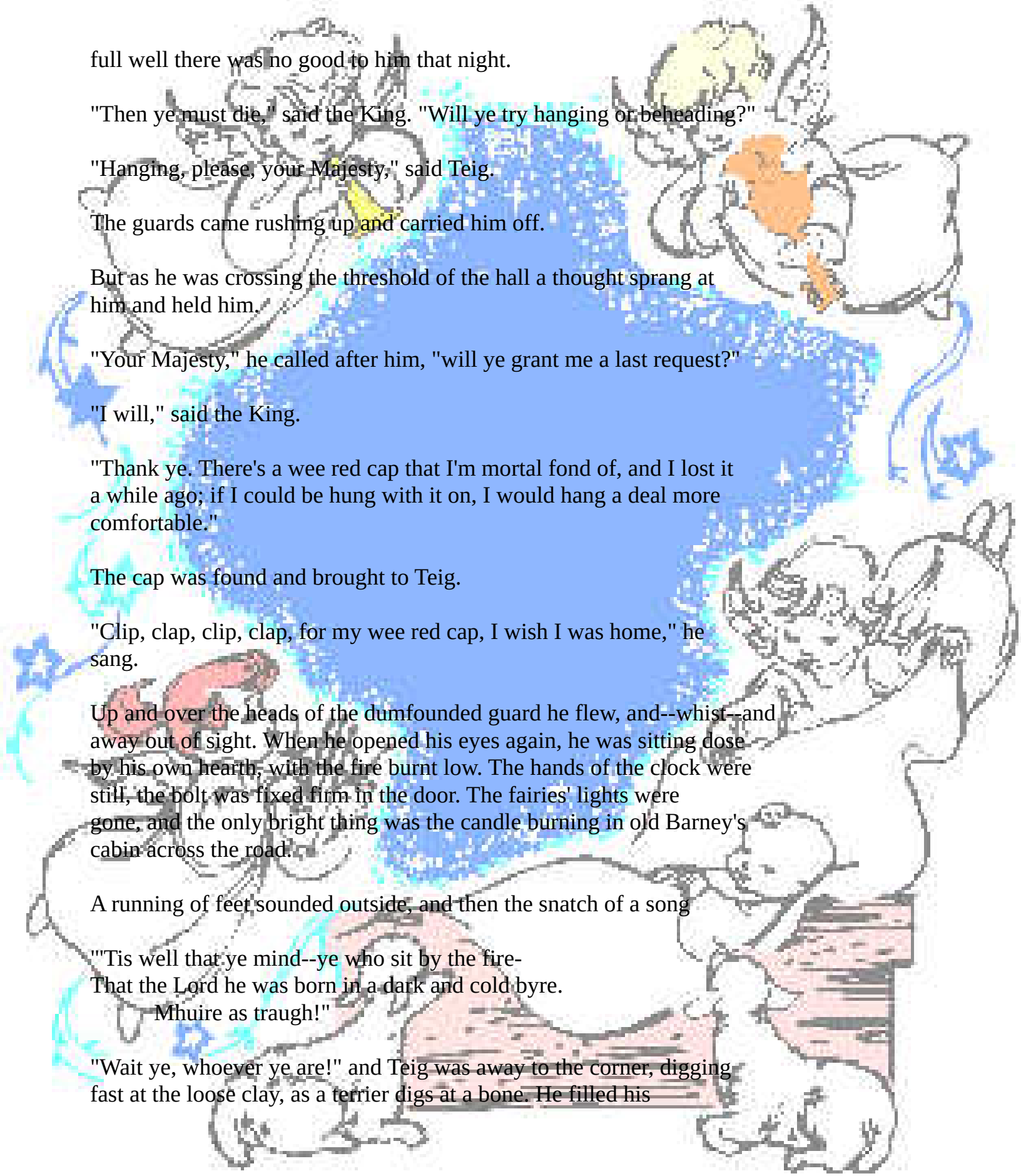
And in a moment all the voices took it up and the hall rang with: "Aye, kill him, kill him!"

Teig's legs took to trembling, and fear put the leash on his tongue; but after a long silence he managed to whisper:

"I have done evil to no one--no one!"

"Maybe," said the King; "but have ye done good? Come, tell us, have ye given aught to any one this night? If ye have, we will pardon ye."

Not a word could Teig say--fear tightened the leash--for he was knowing



full well there was no good to him that night.

"Then ye must die," said the King. "Will ye try hanging or beheading?"

"Hanging, please, your Majesty," said Teig.

The guards came rushing up and carried him off.

But as he was crossing the threshold of the hall a thought sprang at him and held him.

"Your Majesty," he called after him, "will ye grant me a last request?"

"I will," said the King.

"Thank ye. There's a wee red cap that I'm mortal fond of, and I lost it a while ago; if I could be hung with it on, I would hang a deal more comfortable."

The cap was found and brought to Teig.

"Clip, clap, clip, clap, for my wee red cap, I wish I was home," he sang.

Up and over the heads of the dumfounded guard he flew, and--whist--and away out of sight. When he opened his eyes again, he was sitting close by his own hearth, with the fire burnt low. The hands of the clock were still, the bolt was fixed firm in the door. The fairies' lights were gone, and the only bright thing was the candle burning in old Barney's cabin across the road.

A running of feet sounded outside, and then the snatch of a song

"'Tis well that ye mind--ye who sit by the fire-
That the Lord he was born in a dark and cold byre.
Mhuire as traugh!"

"Wait ye, whoever ye are!" and Teig was away to the corner, digging fast at the loose clay, as a terrier digs at a bone. He filled his

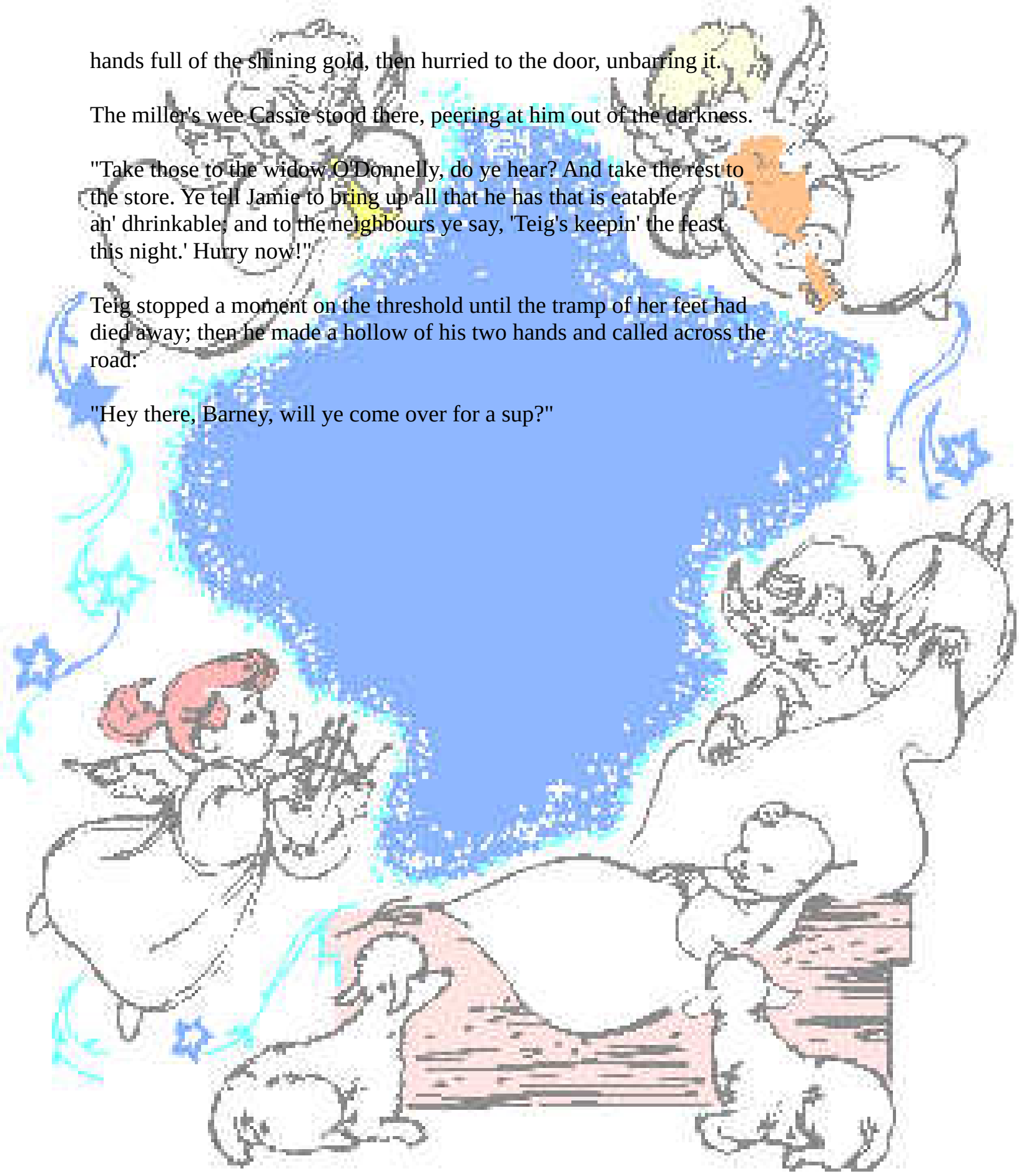
hands full of the shining gold, then hurried to the door, unbarring it.

The miller's wee Cassie stood there, peering at him out of the darkness.

"Take those to the widow O'Donnelly, do ye hear? And take the rest to the store. Ye tell Jamie to bring up all that he has that is eatable an' dhrinkable; and to the neighbours ye say, 'Teig's keepin' the feast this night.' Hurry now!"

Teig stopped a moment on the threshold until the tramp of her feet had died away; then he made a hollow of his two hands and called across the road:

"Hey there, Barney, will ye come over for a sup?"



A STORY OF THE CHRIST-CHILD*
A German legend for Christmas Eve as told by ELIZABETH HARKISON

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Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, on the night before Christmas, a little child was wandering all alone through the streets of a great city. There were many people on the street, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, and even gray-haired grandfathers and grandmothers, all of whom were hurrying home with bundles of presents for each other and for their little ones. Fine carriages rolled by, express wagons rattled past, even old carts were pressed into service, and all things seemed in a hurry and glad with expectation of the coming Christmas morning.

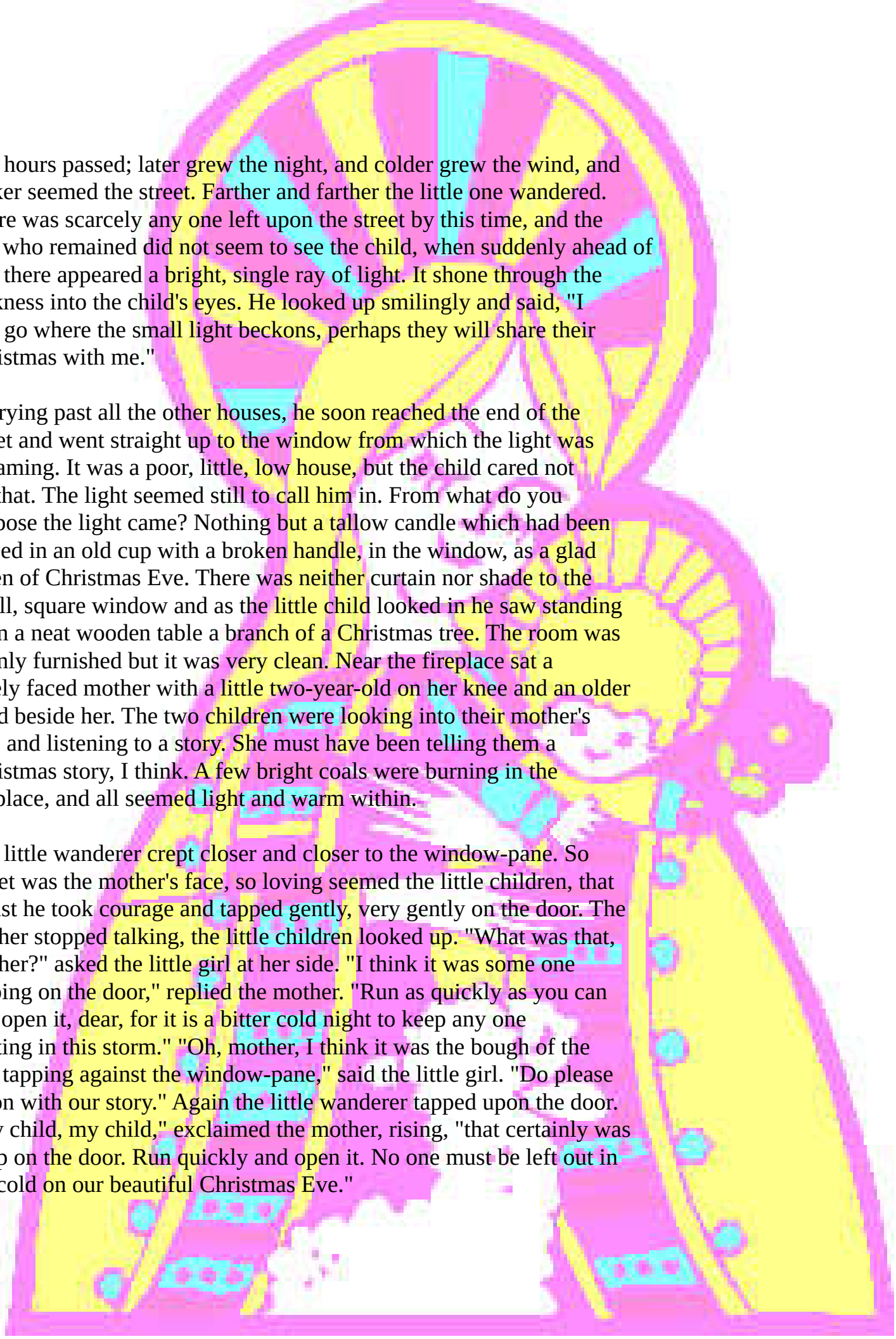
From some of the windows bright lights were already beginning to stream until it was almost as bright as day. But the little child seemed to have no home, and wandered about listlessly from street to street. No one took any notice of him except perhaps Jack Frost, who bit his bare toes and made the ends of his fingers tingle. The north wind, too, seemed to notice the child, for it blew against him and pierced his ragged garments through and through, causing him to shiver with cold. Home after home he passed, looking with longing eyes through the windows, in upon the glad, happy children, most of whom were helping to trim the Christmas trees for the coming morrow.

"Surely," said the child to himself, "where there is so must gladness and happiness, some of it may be for me." So with timid steps he approached a large and handsome house. Through the windows, he could see a tall and stately Christmas tree already lighted. Many presents hung upon it. Its green boughs were trimmed with gold and silver ornaments. Slowly he climbed up the broad steps and gently rapped at the door. It was opened by a large man-servant. He had a kindly face, although his voice was deep and gruff. He looked at the little child for a moment, then sadly shook his head and said, "Go down off the

steps. There is no room here for such as you." He looked sorry as he spoke; possibly he remembered his own little ones at home, and was glad that they were not out in this cold and bitter night. Through the open door a bright light shone, and the warm air, filled with fragrance of the Christmas pine, rushed out from the inner room and greeted the little wanderer with a kiss. As the child turned back into the cold and darkness, he wondered why the footman had spoken thus, for surely, thought he, those little children would love to have another companion join them in their joyous Christmas festival. But the little children inside did not even know that he had knocked at the door.

The street grew colder and darker as the child passed on. He went sadly forward, saying to himself, "Is there no one in all this great city who will share the Christmas with me?" Farther and farther down the street he wandered, to where the homes were not so large and beautiful. There seemed to be little children inside of nearly all the houses. They were dancing and frolicking about. Christmas trees could be seen in nearly every window, with beautiful dolls and trumpets and picture-books and balls and tops and other dainty toys hung upon them. In one window the child noticed a little lamb made of soft white wool. Around its neck was tied a red ribbon. It had evidently been hung on the tree for one of the children. The little stranger stopped before this window and looked long and earnestly at the beautiful things inside, but most of all was he drawn toward the white lamb. At last creeping up to the window-pane, he gently tapped upon it. A little girl came to the window and looked out into the dark street where the snow had now begun to fall. She saw the child, but she only frowned and shook her head and said, "Go away and come some other time. We are too busy to take care of you now." Back into the dark, cold streets he turned again. The wind was whirling past him and seemed to say, "Hurry on, hurry on, we have no time to stop. 'Tis Christmas Eve and everybody is in a hurry to-night."

Again and again the little child rapped softly at door or window-pane. At each place he was refused admission. One mother feared he might have some ugly disease which her darlings would catch; another father said he had only enough for his own children and none to spare for beggars. Still another told him to go home where he belonged, and not to trouble other folks.



The hours passed; later grew the night, and colder grew the wind, and darker seemed the street. Farther and farther the little one wandered. There was scarcely any one left upon the street by this time, and the few who remained did not seem to see the child, when suddenly ahead of him there appeared a bright, single ray of light. It shone through the darkness into the child's eyes. He looked up smilingly and said, "I will go where the small light beckons, perhaps they will share their Christmas with me."

Hurrying past all the other houses, he soon reached the end of the street and went straight up to the window from which the light was streaming. It was a poor, little, low house, but the child cared not for that. The light seemed still to call him in. From what do you suppose the light came? Nothing but a tallow candle which had been placed in an old cup with a broken handle, in the window, as a glad token of Christmas Eve. There was neither curtain nor shade to the small, square window and as the little child looked in he saw standing upon a neat wooden table a branch of a Christmas tree. The room was plainly furnished but it was very clean. Near the fireplace sat a lovely faced mother with a little two-year-old on her knee and an older child beside her. The two children were looking into their mother's face and listening to a story. She must have been telling them a Christmas story, I think. A few bright coals were burning in the fireplace, and all seemed light and warm within.

The little wanderer crept closer and closer to the window-pane. So sweet was the mother's face, so loving seemed the little children, that at last he took courage and tapped gently, very gently on the door. The mother stopped talking, the little children looked up. "What was that, mother?" asked the little girl at her side. "I think it was some one tapping on the door," replied the mother. "Run as quickly as you can and open it, dear, for it is a bitter cold night to keep any one waiting in this storm." "Oh, mother, I think it was the bough of the tree tapping against the window-pane," said the little girl. "Do please go on with our story." Again the little wanderer tapped upon the door. "My child, my child," exclaimed the mother, rising, "that certainly was a rap on the door. Run quickly and open it. No one must be left out in the cold on our beautiful Christmas Eve."

The child ran to the door and threw it wide open. The mother saw the ragged stranger standing without, cold and shivering, with bare head and almost bare feet. She held out both hands and drew him into the warm, bright room. "You poor, dear child," was all she said, and putting her arms around him, she drew him close to her breast. "He is very cold, my children," she exclaimed. "We must warm him." "And," added the little girl, "we must love him and give him some of our Christmas, too." "Yes," said the mother, "but first let us warm him--"

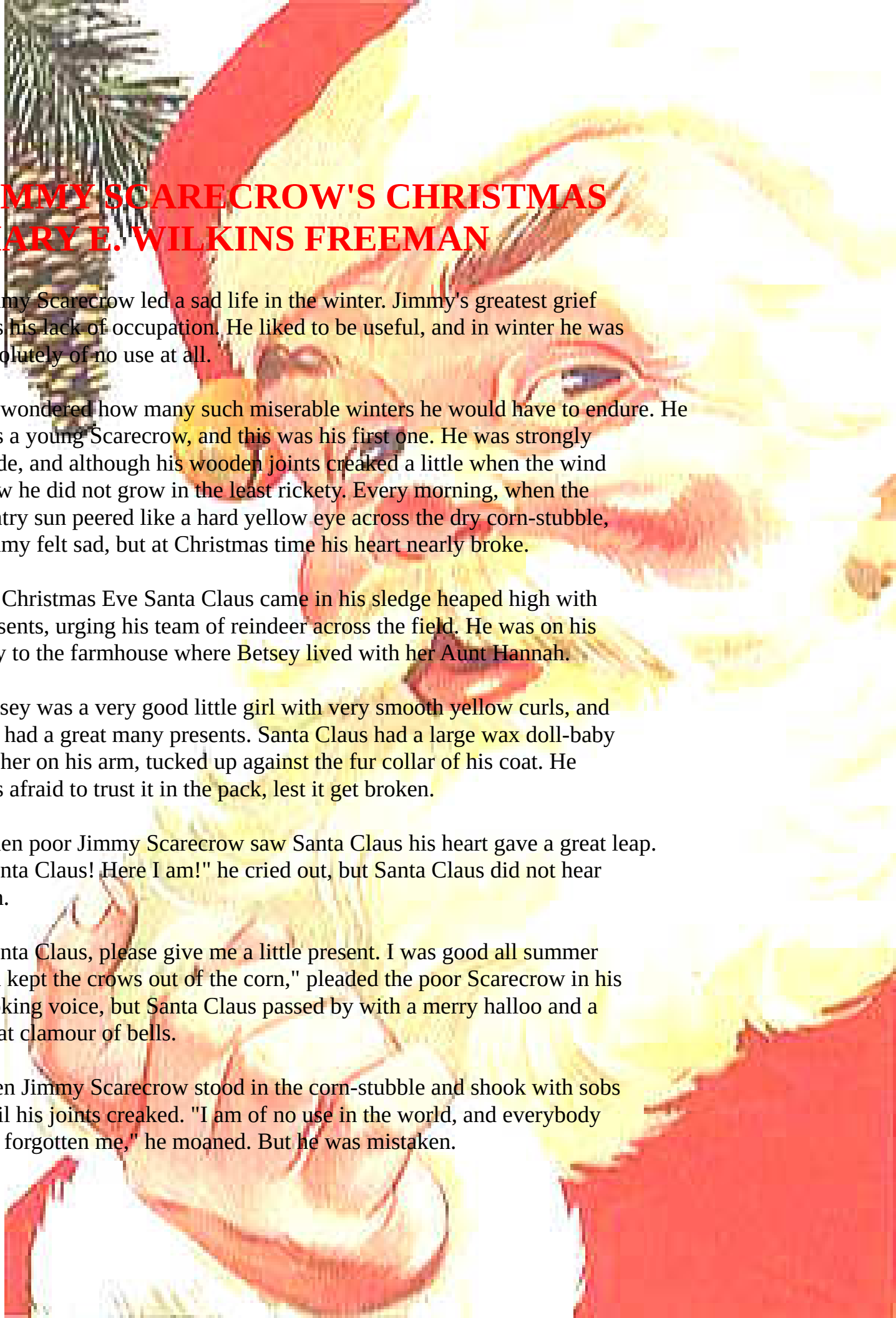
The mother sat down by the fire with the little child on her lap, and her own little ones warmed his half-frozen hands in theirs. The mother smoothed his tangled curls, and, bending low over his head, kissed the child's face. She gathered the three little ones in her arms and the candle and the fire light shone over them. For a moment the room was very still. By and by the little girl said softly, to her mother, "May we not light the Christmas tree, and let him see how beautiful it looks?" "Yes," said the mother. With that she seated the child on a low stool beside the fire, and went herself to fetch the few simple ornaments which from year to year she had saved for her children's Christmas tree. They were soon so busy that they did not notice the room had filled with a strange and brilliant light. They turned and looked at the spot where the little wanderer sat. His ragged clothes had changed to garments white and beautiful; his tangled curls seemed like a halo of golden light about his head; but most glorious of all was his face, which shone with a light so dazzling that they could scarcely look upon it.

In silent wonder they gazed at the child. Their little room seemed to grow larger and larger, until it was as wide as the whole world, the roof of their low house seemed to expand and rise, until it reached to the sky.

With a sweet and gentle smile the wonderful child looked upon them for a moment, and then slowly rose and floated through the air, above the treetops, beyond the church spire, higher even than the clouds themselves, until he appeared to them to be a shining star in the sky above. At last he disappeared from sight. The astonished children turned in hushed awe to their mother, and said in a whisper, "Oh,

mother, it was the Christ-Child, was it not?" And the mother answered in a low tone, "Yes."

And it is said, dear children, that each Christmas Eve the little Christ-Child wanders through some town or village, and those who receive him and take him into their homes and hearts have given to them this marvellous vision which is denied to others.



JIMMY SCARECROW'S CHRISTMAS
MARY E. WILKINS FREEMAN

Jimmy Scarecrow led a sad life in the winter. Jimmy's greatest grief was his lack of occupation. He liked to be useful, and in winter he was absolutely of no use at all.

He wondered how many such miserable winters he would have to endure. He was a young Scarecrow, and this was his first one. He was strongly made, and although his wooden joints creaked a little when the wind blew he did not grow in the least rickety. Every morning, when the wintry sun peered like a hard yellow eye across the dry corn-stubble, Jimmy felt sad, but at Christmas time his heart nearly broke.

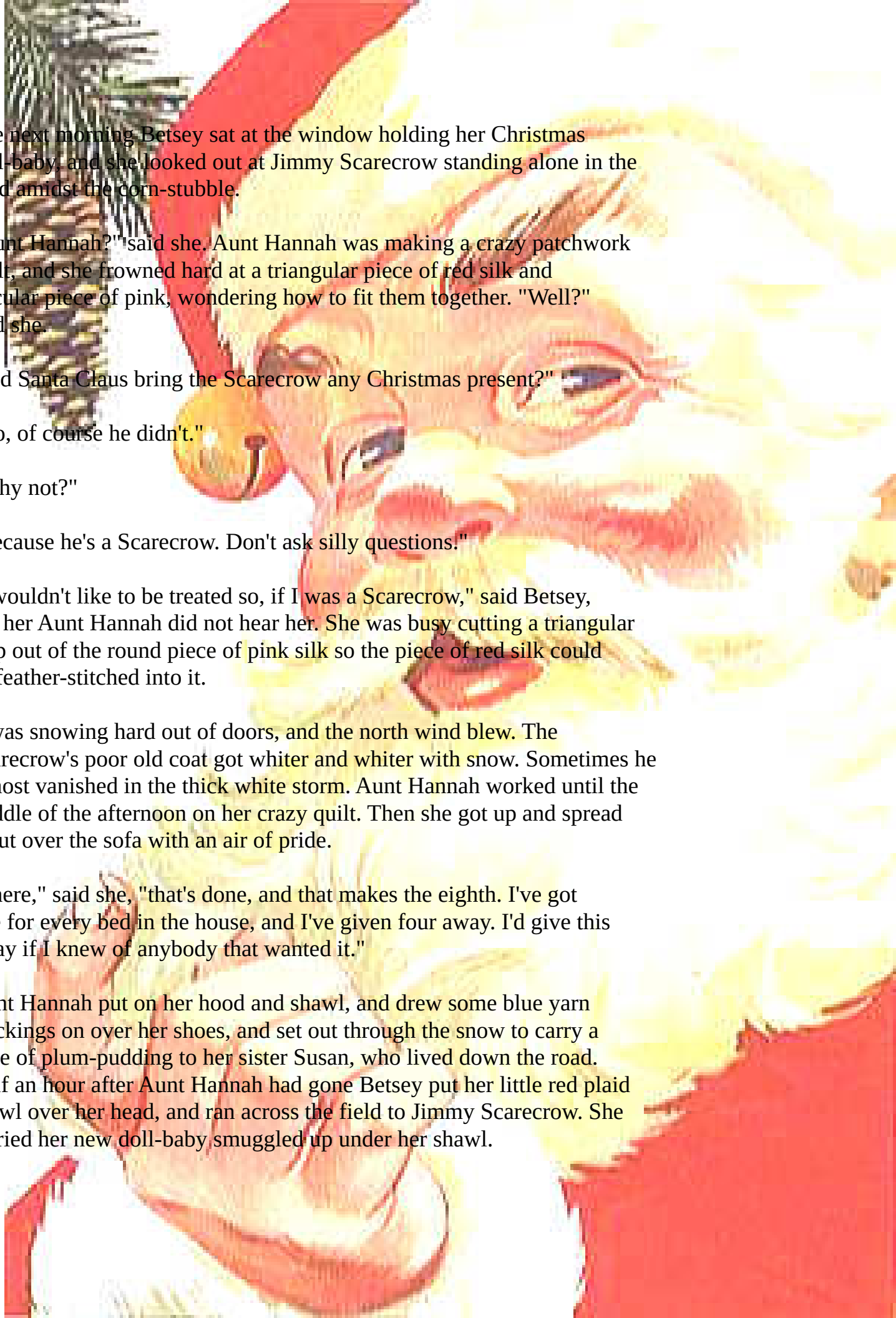
On Christmas Eve Santa Claus came in his sledge heaped high with presents, urging his team of reindeer across the field. He was on his way to the farmhouse where Betsey lived with her Aunt Hannah.

Betsey was a very good little girl with very smooth yellow curls, and she had a great many presents. Santa Claus had a large wax doll-baby for her on his arm, tucked up against the fur collar of his coat. He was afraid to trust it in the pack, lest it get broken.

When poor Jimmy Scarecrow saw Santa Claus his heart gave a great leap. "Santa Claus! Here I am!" he cried out, but Santa Claus did not hear him.

"Santa Claus, please give me a little present. I was good all summer and kept the crows out of the corn," pleaded the poor Scarecrow in his choking voice, but Santa Claus passed by with a merry halloo and a great clamour of bells.

Then Jimmy Scarecrow stood in the corn-stubble and shook with sobs until his joints creaked. "I am of no use in the world, and everybody has forgotten me," he moaned. But he was mistaken.



The next morning Betsey sat at the window holding her Christmas doll-baby, and she looked out at Jimmy Scarecrow standing alone in the field amidst the corn-stubble.

"Aunt Hannah?" said she. Aunt Hannah was making a crazy patchwork quilt, and she frowned hard at a triangular piece of red silk and circular piece of pink, wondering how to fit them together. "Well?" said she.

"Did Santa Claus bring the Scarecrow any Christmas present?"

"No, of course he didn't."

"Why not?"

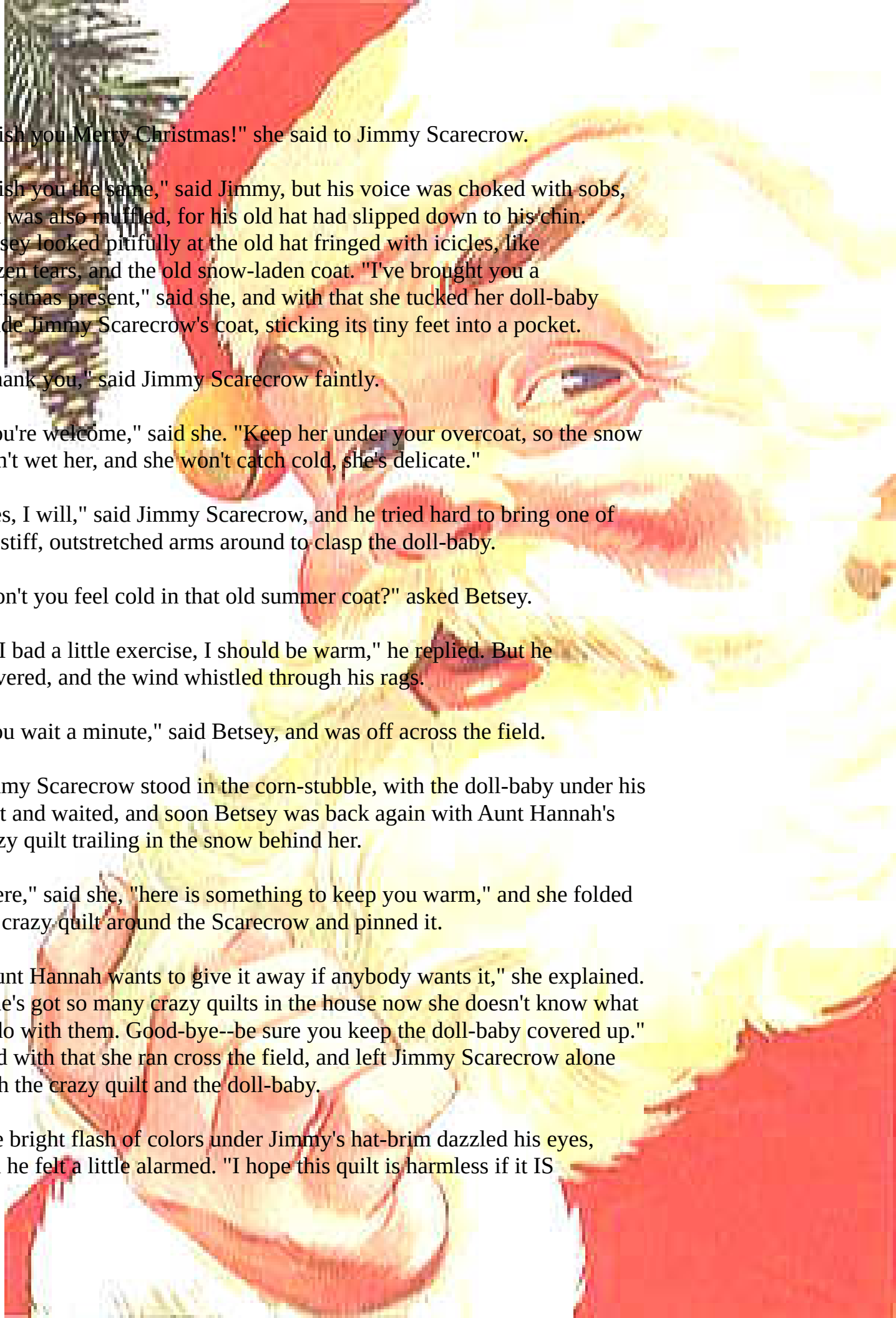
"Because he's a Scarecrow. Don't ask silly questions!"

"I wouldn't like to be treated so, if I was a Scarecrow," said Betsey, but her Aunt Hannah did not hear her. She was busy cutting a triangular snip out of the round piece of pink silk so the piece of red silk could be feather-stitched into it.

It was snowing hard out of doors, and the north wind blew. The Scarecrow's poor old coat got whiter and whiter with snow. Sometimes he almost vanished in the thick white storm. Aunt Hannah worked until the middle of the afternoon on her crazy quilt. Then she got up and spread it out over the sofa with an air of pride.

"There," said she, "that's done, and that makes the eighth. I've got one for every bed in the house, and I've given four away. I'd give this away if I knew of anybody that wanted it."

Aunt Hannah put on her hood and shawl, and drew some blue yarn stockings on over her shoes, and set out through the snow to carry a slice of plum-pudding to her sister Susan, who lived down the road. Half an hour after Aunt Hannah had gone Betsey put her little red plaid shawl over her head, and ran across the field to Jimmy Scarecrow. She carried her new doll-baby smuggled up under her shawl.



"Wish you Merry Christmas!" she said to Jimmy Scarecrow.

"Wish you the same," said Jimmy, but his voice was choked with sobs, and was also muffled, for his old hat had slipped down to his chin. Betsey looked pitifully at the old hat fringed with icicles, like frozen tears, and the old snow-laden coat. "I've brought you a Christmas present," said she, and with that she tucked her doll-baby inside Jimmy Scarecrow's coat, sticking its tiny feet into a pocket.

"Thank you," said Jimmy Scarecrow faintly.

"You're welcome," said she. "Keep her under your overcoat, so the snow won't wet her, and she won't catch cold, she's delicate."

"Yes, I will," said Jimmy Scarecrow, and he tried hard to bring one of his stiff, outstretched arms around to clasp the doll-baby.

"Don't you feel cold in that old summer coat?" asked Betsey.

"If I bad a little exercise, I should be warm," he replied. But he shivered, and the wind whistled through his rags.

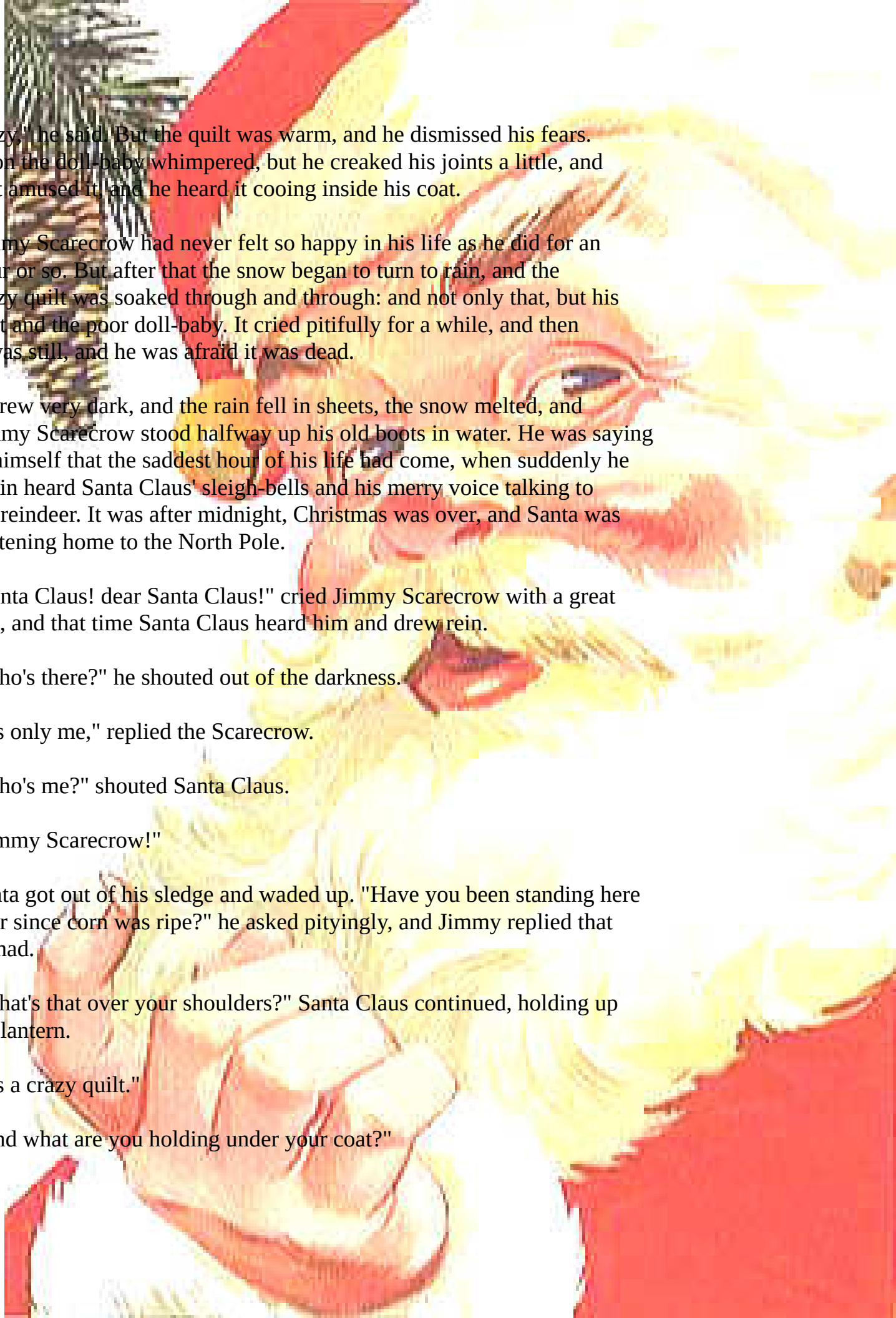
"You wait a minute," said Betsey, and was off across the field.

Jimmy Scarecrow stood in the corn-stubble, with the doll-baby under his coat and waited, and soon Betsey was back again with Aunt Hannah's crazy quilt trailing in the snow behind her.

"Here," said she, "here is something to keep you warm," and she folded the crazy quilt around the Scarecrow and pinned it.

"Aunt Hannah wants to give it away if anybody wants it," she explained. "She's got so many crazy quilts in the house now she doesn't know what to do with them. Good-bye--be sure you keep the doll-baby covered up." And with that she ran cross the field, and left Jimmy Scarecrow alone with the crazy quilt and the doll-baby.

The bright flash of colors under Jimmy's hat-brim dazzled his eyes, and he felt a little alarmed. "I hope this quilt is harmless if it IS



crazy," he said. But the quilt was warm, and he dismissed his fears. Soon the doll-baby whimpered, but he creaked his joints a little, and that amused it, and he heard it cooing inside his coat.

Jimmy Scarecrow had never felt so happy in his life as he did for an hour or so. But after that the snow began to turn to rain, and the crazy quilt was soaked through and through: and not only that, but his coat and the poor doll-baby. It cried pitifully for a while, and then it was still, and he was afraid it was dead.

It grew very dark, and the rain fell in sheets, the snow melted, and Jimmy Scarecrow stood halfway up his old boots in water. He was saying to himself that the saddest hour of his life had come, when suddenly he again heard Santa Claus' sleigh-bells and his merry voice talking to his reindeer. It was after midnight, Christmas was over, and Santa was hastening home to the North Pole.

"Santa Claus! dear Santa Claus!" cried Jimmy Scarecrow with a great sob, and that time Santa Claus heard him and drew rein.

"Who's there?" he shouted out of the darkness.

"It's only me," replied the Scarecrow.

"Who's me?" shouted Santa Claus.

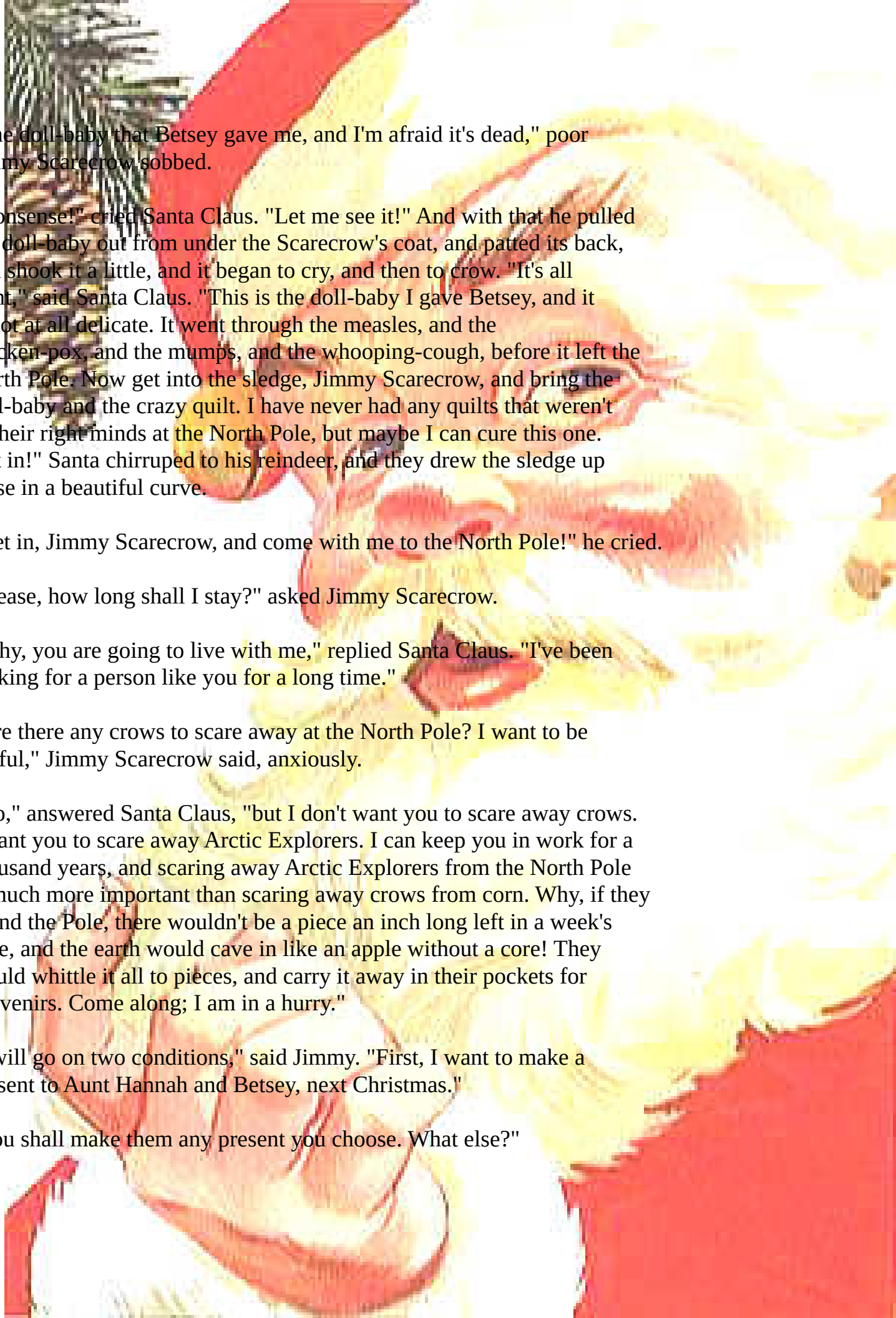
"Jimmy Scarecrow!"

Santa got out of his sledge and waded up. "Have you been standing here ever since corn was ripe?" he asked pityingly, and Jimmy replied that he had.

"What's that over your shoulders?" Santa Claus continued, holding up his lantern.

"It's a crazy quilt."

"And what are you holding under your coat?"



"The doll-baby that Betsey gave me, and I'm afraid it's dead," poor Jimmy Scarecrow sobbed.

"Nonsense!" cried Santa Claus. "Let me see it!" And with that he pulled the doll-baby out from under the Scarecrow's coat, and patted its back, and shook it a little, and it began to cry, and then to crow. "It's all right," said Santa Claus. "This is the doll-baby I gave Betsey, and it is not at all delicate. It went through the measles, and the chicken-pox, and the mumps, and the whooping-cough, before it left the North Pole. Now get into the sledge, Jimmy Scarecrow, and bring the doll-baby and the crazy quilt. I have never had any quilts that weren't in their right minds at the North Pole, but maybe I can cure this one. Get in!" Santa chirruped to his reindeer, and they drew the sledge up close in a beautiful curve.

"Get in, Jimmy Scarecrow, and come with me to the North Pole!" he cried.

"Please, how long shall I stay?" asked Jimmy Scarecrow.

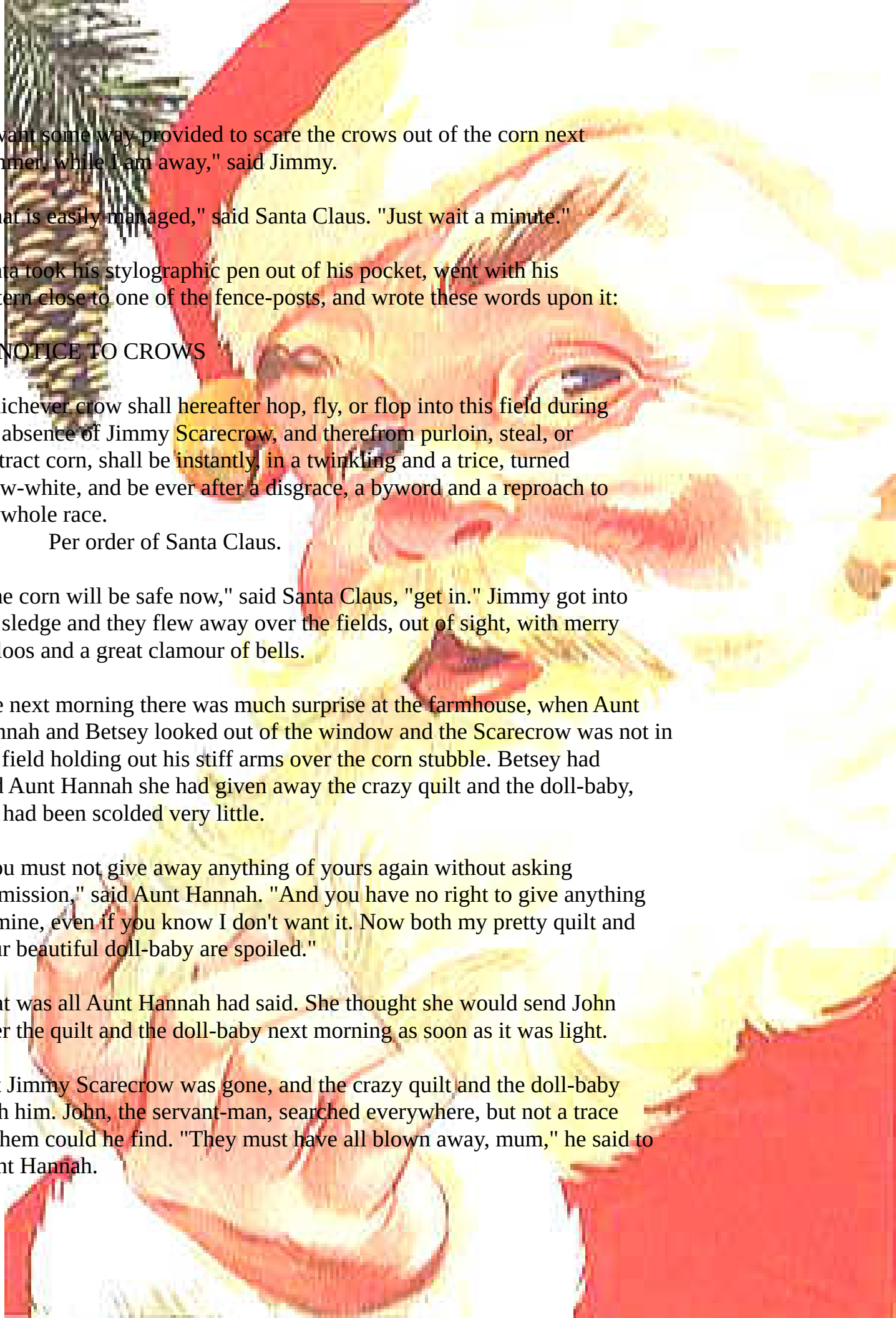
"Why, you are going to live with me," replied Santa Claus. "I've been looking for a person like you for a long time."

"Are there any crows to scare away at the North Pole? I want to be useful," Jimmy Scarecrow said, anxiously.

"No," answered Santa Claus, "but I don't want you to scare away crows. I want you to scare away Arctic Explorers. I can keep you in work for a thousand years, and scaring away Arctic Explorers from the North Pole is much more important than scaring away crows from corn. Why, if they found the Pole, there wouldn't be a piece an inch long left in a week's time, and the earth would cave in like an apple without a core! They would whittle it all to pieces, and carry it away in their pockets for souvenirs. Come along; I am in a hurry."

"I will go on two conditions," said Jimmy. "First, I want to make a present to Aunt Hannah and Betsey, next Christmas."

"You shall make them any present you choose. What else?"



"I want some way provided to scare the crows out of the corn next summer, while I am away," said Jimmy.

"That is easily managed," said Santa Claus. "Just wait a minute."

Santa took his stylographic pen out of his pocket, went with his lantern close to one of the fence-posts, and wrote these words upon it:

NOTICE TO CROWS

Whichever crow shall hereafter hop, fly, or flop into this field during the absence of Jimmy Scarecrow, and therefrom purloin, steal, or abstract corn, shall be instantly, in a twinkling and a trice, turned snow-white, and be ever after a disgrace, a byword and a reproach to his whole race.

Per order of Santa Claus.

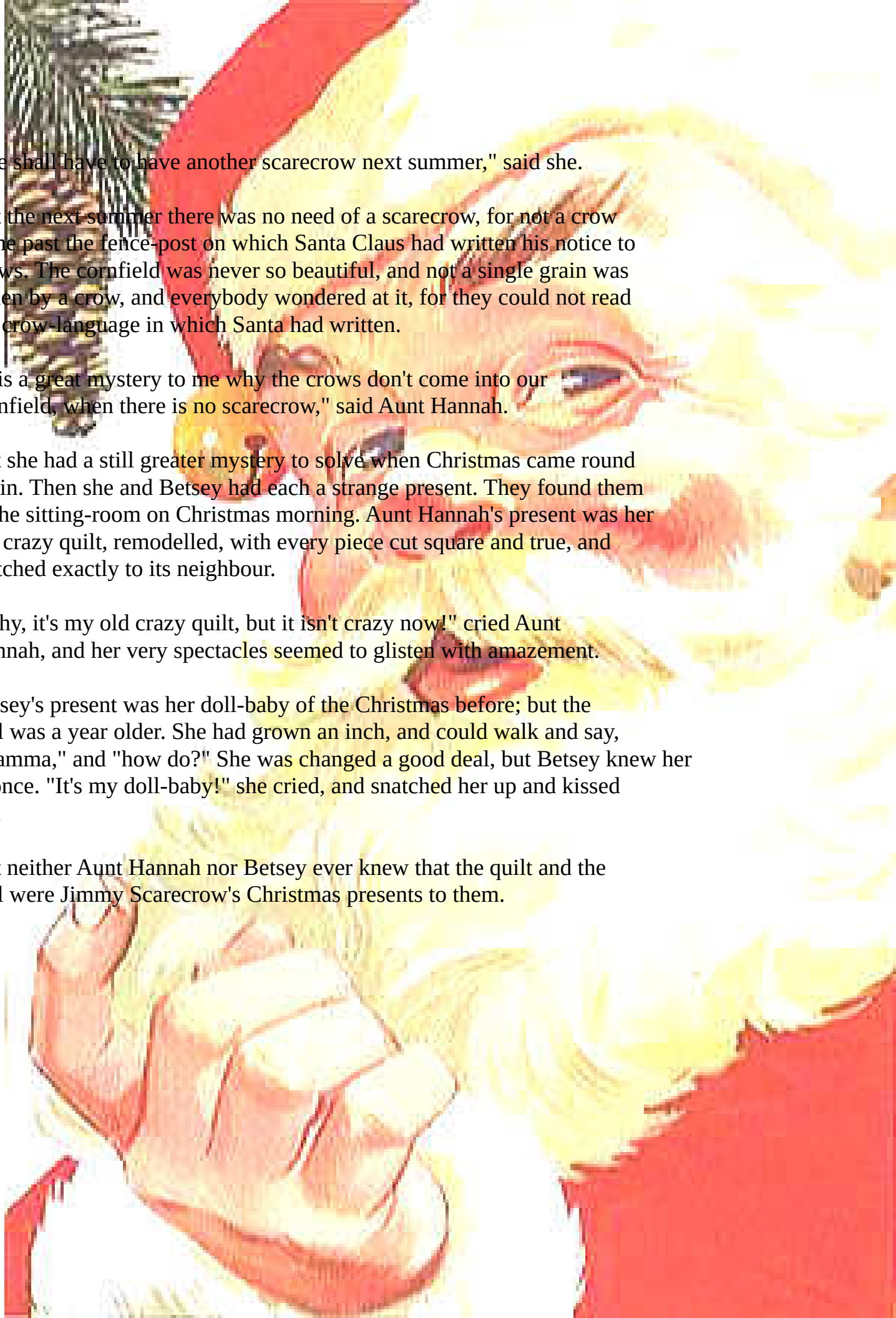
"The corn will be safe now," said Santa Claus, "get in." Jimmy got into the sledge and they flew away over the fields, out of sight, with merry halloos and a great clamour of bells.

The next morning there was much surprise at the farmhouse, when Aunt Hannah and Betsey looked out of the window and the Scarecrow was not in the field holding out his stiff arms over the corn stubble. Betsey had told Aunt Hannah she had given away the crazy quilt and the doll-baby, but had been scolded very little.

"You must not give away anything of yours again without asking permission," said Aunt Hannah. "And you have no right to give anything of mine, even if you know I don't want it. Now both my pretty quilt and your beautiful doll-baby are spoiled."

That was all Aunt Hannah had said. She thought she would send John after the quilt and the doll-baby next morning as soon as it was light.

But Jimmy Scarecrow was gone, and the crazy quilt and the doll-baby with him. John, the servant-man, searched everywhere, but not a trace of them could he find. "They must have all blown away, mum," he said to Aunt Hannah.



"We shall have to have another scarecrow next summer," said she.

But the next summer there was no need of a scarecrow, for not a crow came past the fence-post on which Santa Claus had written his notice to crows. The cornfield was never so beautiful, and not a single grain was stolen by a crow, and everybody wondered at it, for they could not read the crow-language in which Santa had written.

"It is a great mystery to me why the crows don't come into our cornfield, when there is no scarecrow," said Aunt Hannah.

But she had a still greater mystery to solve when Christmas came round again. Then she and Betsey had each a strange present. They found them in the sitting-room on Christmas morning. Aunt Hannah's present was her old crazy quilt, remodelled, with every piece cut square and true, and matched exactly to its neighbour.

"Why, it's my old crazy quilt, but it isn't crazy now!" cried Aunt Hannah, and her very spectacles seemed to glisten with amazement.

Betsey's present was her doll-baby of the Christmas before; but the doll was a year older. She had grown an inch, and could walk and say, "mamma," and "how do?" She was changed a good deal, but Betsey knew her at once. "It's my doll-baby!" she cried, and snatched her up and kissed her.

But neither Aunt Hannah nor Betsey ever knew that the quilt and the doll were Jimmy Scarecrow's Christmas presents to them.

A CHRISTMAS STAR*
KATHERINE PYLE

* Published by permission of the American Book Co.

"Come now, my dear little stars," said Mother Moon, "and I will tell you the Christmas story."

Every morning for a week before Christmas, Mother Moon used to call all the little stars around her and tell them a story.

It was always the same story, but the stars never wearied of it. It was the story of the Christmas star--the Star of Bethlehem.

When Mother Moon had finished the story the little stars always said: "And the star is shining still, isn't it, Mother Moon, even if we can't see it?"

And Mother Moon would answer: "Yes, my dears, only now it shines for men's hearts instead of their eyes."

Then the stars would bid the Mother Moon good-night and put on their little blue nightcaps and go to bed in the sky chamber; for the stars' bedtime is when people down on the earth are beginning to waken and see that it is morning.

But that particular morning when the little stars said good-night and went quietly away, one golden star still lingered beside Mother Moon.

"What is the matter, my little star?" asked the Mother Moon. "Why don't you go with your little sisters?"

"Oh, Mother Moon," said the golden star. "I am so sad! I wish I could shine for some one's heart like that star of wonder that you tell us

about."

"Why, aren't you happy up here in the sky country?" asked Mother Moon.

"Yes, I have been very happy," said the star; "but to-night it seems just as if I must find some heart to shine for."

"Then if that is so," said Mother Moon, "the time has come, my little star, for you to go through the Wonder Entry."

"The Wonder Entry? What is that?" asked the star. But the Mother Moon made no answer.

Rising, she took the little star by the hand and led it to a door that it had never seen before.

The Mother Moon opened the door, and there was a long dark entry; at the far end was shining a little speck of light.

"What is this?" asked the star.

"It is the Wonder Entry; and it is through this that you must go to find the heart where you belong," said the Mother Moon.

Then the little star was afraid.

It longed to go through the entry as it had never longed for anything before; and yet it was afraid and clung to the Mother Moon.

But very gently, almost sadly, the Mother Moon drew her hand away. "Go, my child," she said.

Then, wondering and trembling, the little star stepped into the Wonder Entry, and the door of the sky house closed behind it.

The next thing the star knew it was hanging in a toy shop with a whole row of other stars blue and red and silver. It itself was gold. The shop smelled of evergreen, and was full of Christmas shoppers, men and women and children; but of them all, the star looked at no one but a

little boy standing in front of the counter; for as soon as the star saw the child it knew that he was the one to whom it belonged.

The little boy was standing beside a sweet-faced woman in a long black veil and he was not looking at anything in particular.

The star shook and trembled on the string that held it, because it was afraid lest the child would not see it, or lest, if he did, he would not know it as his star.

The lady had a number of toys on the counter before her, and she was saying: "Now I think we have presents for every one: There's the doll for Lou, and the game for Ned, and the music box for May; and then the rocking horse and the sled."

Suddenly the little boy caught her by the arm. "Oh, mother," he said. He had seen the star.

"Well, what is it, darling?" asked the lady.

"Oh, mother, just see that star up there! I wish--oh, I do wish I had it."

"Oh, my dear, we have so many things for the Christmas-tree," said the mother.

"Yes, I know, but I do want the star," said the child.

"Very well," said the mother, smiling; "then we will take that, too."

So the star was taken down from the place where it hung and wrapped up in a piece of paper, and all the while it thrilled with joy, for now it belonged to the little boy.

It was not until the afternoon before Christmas, when the tree was being decorated, that the golden star was unwrapped and taken out from the paper.

"Here is something else," said the sweet-faced lady. "We must hang this

on the tree. Paul took such a fancy to it that I had to get it for him. He will never be satisfied unless we hang it on too."

"Oh, yes," said some one else who was helping to decorate the tree; "we will hang it here on the very top."

So the little star hung on the highest branch of the Christmas-tree.

That evening all the candles were lighted on the Christmas-tree, and there were so many that they fairly dazzled the eyes; and the gold and silver balls, the fairies and the glass fruits, shone and twinkled in the light; and high above them all shone the golden star.

At seven o'clock a bell was rung, and then the folding doors of the room where the Christmas-tree stood were thrown open, and a crowd of children came trooping in.

They laughed and shouted and pointed, and all talked together, and after a while there was music, and presents were taken from the tree and given to the children.

How different it all was from the great wide, still sky house!

But the star had never been so happy in all its life; for the little boy was there.

He stood apart from the other children, looking up at the star, with his hands clasped behind him, and he did not seem to care for the toys and the games.

At last it was all over. The lights were put out, the children went home, and the house grew still.

Then the ornaments on the tree began to talk among themselves.

"So that is all over," said a silver ball. "It was very gay this evening--the gayest Christmas I remember."

"Yes," said a glass bunch of grapes; "the best of it is over. Of course

people will come to look at us for several days yet, but it won't be like this evening."

"And then I suppose we'll be laid away for another year," said a paper fairy. "Really it seems hardly worth while. Such a few days out of the year and then to be shut up in the dark box again. I almost wish I were a paper doll."

The bunch of grapes was wrong in saying that people would come to look at the Christmas-tree the next few days, for it stood neglected in the library and nobody came near it. Everybody in the house went about very quietly, with anxious faces; for the little boy was ill.

At last, one evening, a woman came into the room with a servant. The woman wore the cap and apron of a nurse.

"That is it," she said, pointing to the golden star. The servant climbed up on some steps and took down the star and put it in the nurse's hand, and she carried it out into the hall and upstairs to a room where the little boy lay.

The sweet-faced lady was sitting by the bed, and as the nurse came in she held out her hand for the star.

"Is this what you wanted, my darling?" she asked, bending over the little boy.

The child nodded and held out his hands for the star; and as he clasped it a wonderful, shining smile came over his face.

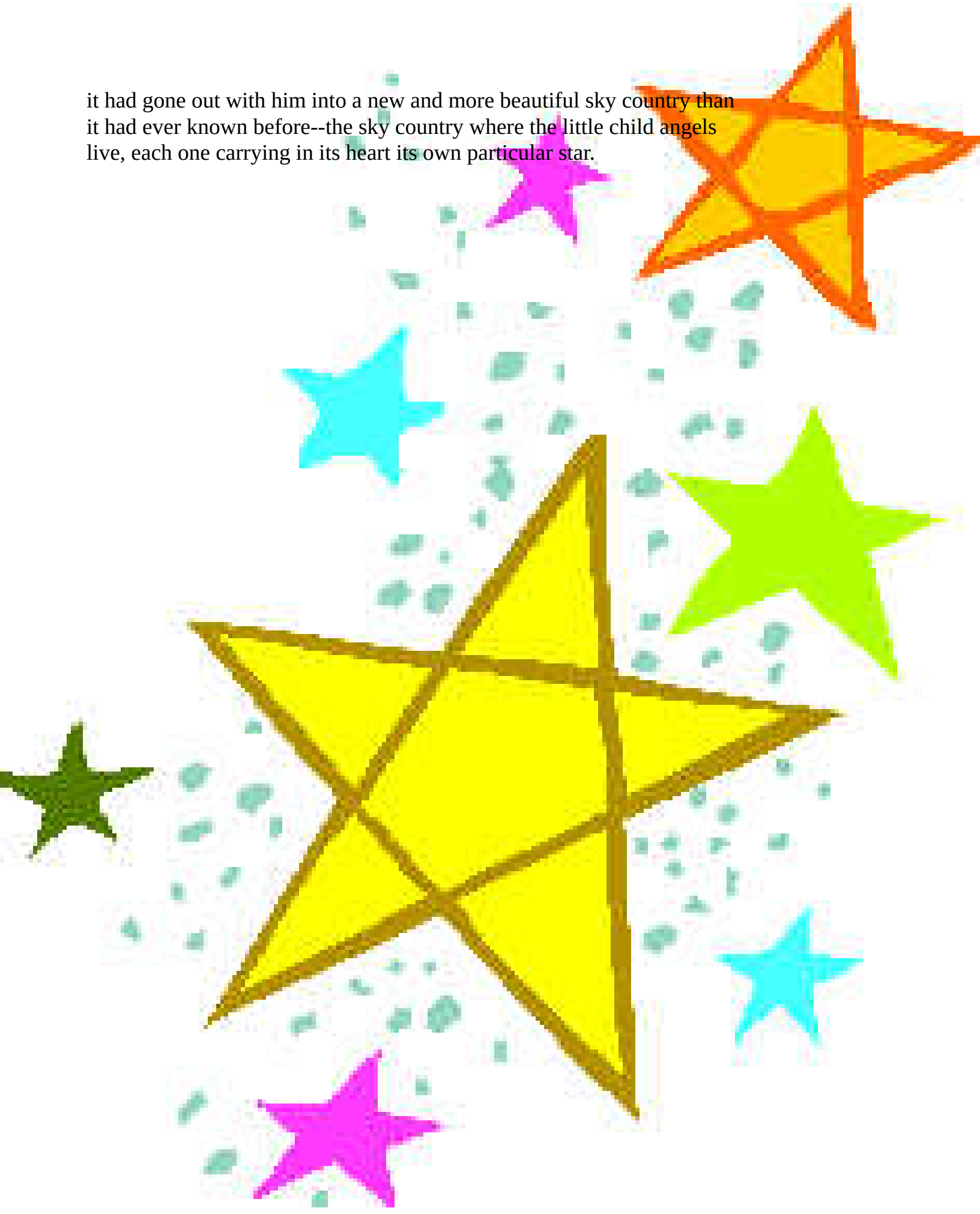
The next morning the little boy's room was very still and dark.

The golden piece of paper that had been the star lay on a table beside the bed, its five points very sharp and bright.

But it was not the real star, any more than a person's body is the real person.

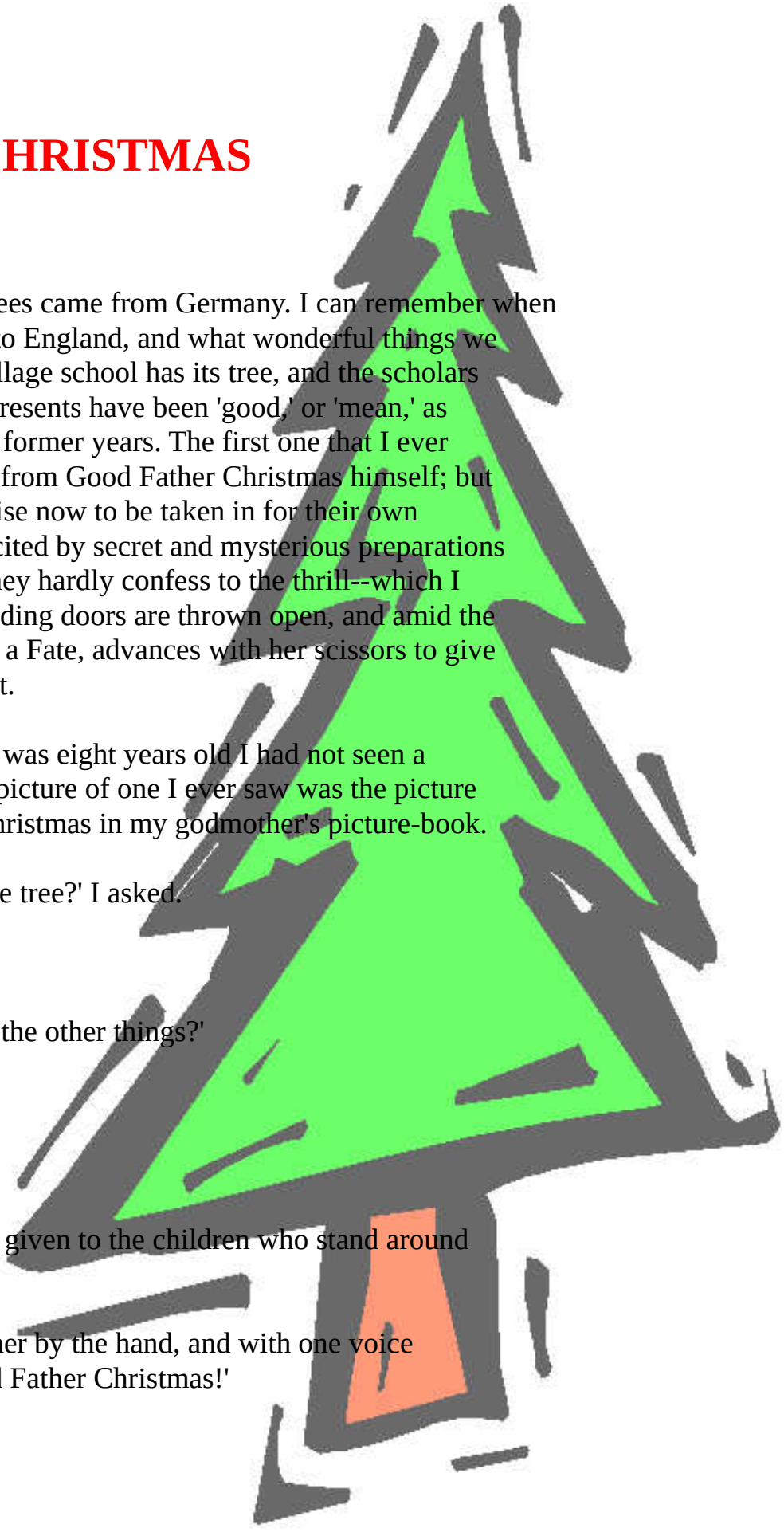
The real star was living and shining now in the little boy's heart, and

it had gone out with him into a new and more beautiful sky country than it had ever known before--the sky country where the little child angels live, each one carrying in its heart its own particular star.



OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS

J.H. EWING



"The custom of Christmas-trees came from Germany. I can remember when they were first introduced into England, and what wonderful things we thought them. Now, every village school has its tree, and the scholars openly discuss whether the presents have been 'good,' or 'mean,' as compared with other trees in former years. The first one that I ever saw I believed to have come from Good Father Christmas himself; but little boys have grown too wise now to be taken in for their own amusement. They are not excited by secret and mysterious preparations in the back drawing-room; they hardly confess to the thrill--which I feel to this day--when the folding doors are thrown open, and amid the blaze of tapers, mamma, like a Fate, advances with her scissors to give every one what falls to his lot.

"Well, young people, when I was eight years old I had not seen a Christmas-tree, and the first picture of one I ever saw was the picture of that held by Old Father Christmas in my godmother's picture-book.

"'What are those things on the tree?' I asked.

"'Candles,' said my father.

"'No, father, not the candles; the other things?'

"'Those are toys, my son.'

"'Are they ever taken off?'

"'Yes, they are taken off, and given to the children who stand around the tree.'

"Patty and I grasped each other by the hand, and with one voice murmured; 'How kind of Old Father Christmas!'

"By and by I asked, 'How old is Father Christmas?'

"My father laughed, and said, 'One thousand eight hundred and thirty years, child,' which was then the year of our Lord, and thus one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the first great Christmas Day.

"'He LOOKS very old,' whispered Patty.

"And I, who was, for my age, what Kitty called 'Bible-learned,' said thoughtfully, and with some puzzledness of mind, 'Then he's older than Methuselah.'

"But my father had left the room, and did not hear my difficulty.

"November and December went by, and still the picture-book kept all its charm for Patty and me; and we pondered on and loved Old Father Christmas as children can love and realize a fancy friend. To those who remember the fancies of their childhood I need say no more.

"Christmas week came, Christmas Eve came. My father and mother were mysteriously and unaccountably busy in the parlour (we had only one parlour), and Patty and I were not allowed to go in. We went into the kitchen, but even here was no place of rest for as. Kitty was 'all over the place,' as she phrased it, and cakes, mince pies, and puddings were with her. As she justly observed, 'There was no place there for children and books to sit with their toes in the fire, when a body wanted to be at the oven all along. The cat was enough for HER temper,' she added.

"As to puss, who obstinately refused to take a hint which drove her out into the Christmas frost, she returned again and again with soft steps, and a stupidity that was, I think, affected, to the warm hearth, only to fly at intervals, like a football, before Kitty's hasty slipper.

"We had more sense, or less courage. We bowed to Kitty's behests, and went to the back door.

"Patty and I were hardy children, and accustomed to 'run out' in all

weathers, without much extra wrapping up. We put Kitty's shawl over our two heads, and went outside. I rather hoped to see something of Dick, for it was holiday time; but no Dick passed. He was busy helping his father to bore holes in the carved seats of the church, which were to hold sprigs of holly for the morrow--that was the idea of church decoration in my young days. You have improved on your elders there, young people, and I am candid enough to allow it. Still, the sprigs of red and green were better than nothing, and, like your lovely wreaths and pious devices, they made one feel as if the old black wood were bursting into life and leaf again for very Christmas joy; and, if only one knelt carefully, they did not scratch his nose.

"Well, Dick was busy, and not to be seen. We ran across the little yard and looked over the wall at the end to see if we could see anything or anybody. From this point there was a pleasant meadow field sloping prettily away to a little hill about three quarters of a mile distant; which, catching some fine breezes from the moors beyond, was held to be a place of cure for whooping-cough, or kincough, as it was vulgarly called. Up to the top of this Kitty had dragged me, and carried Patty, when we were recovering from the complaint, as I well remember. It was the only 'change of air' we could afford, and I dare say it did as well as if we had gone into badly drained lodgings at the seaside.

"This hill was now covered with snow and stood off against the gray sky. The white fields looked vast and dreary in the dusk. The only gay things to be seen were the berries on the holly hedge, in the little lane--which, running by the end of our back-yard, led up to the Hall--and the fat robin, that was staring at me. I was looking at the robin, when Patty, who had been peering out of her corner of Kitty's shawl, gave a great jump that dragged the shawl from our heads, and cried:

"'Look!'

"I looked. An old man was coming along the lane. His hair and beard were as white as cotton-wool. He had a face like the sort of apple that keeps well in winter; his coat was old and brown. There was snow about him in patches, and he carried a small fir-tree.

"The same conviction seized upon us both. With one breath, we exclaimed, 'IT'S OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS!'

"I know now that it was only an old man of the place, with whom we did not happen to be acquainted and that he was taking a little fir-tree up to the Hall, to be made into a Christmas-tree. He was a very good-humoured old fellow, and rather deaf, for which he made up by smiling and nodding his head a good deal, and saying, 'aye, aye, to be sure!' at likely intervals.

"As he passed us and met our earnest gaze, he smiled and nodded so earnestly that I was bold enough to cry, 'Good-evening, Father Christmas!'

"'Same to you!' said he, in a high-pitched voice.

"'Then you ARE Father Christmas?' said Patty.

"'And a happy New Year,' was Father Christmas's reply, which rather put me out. But he smiled in such a satisfactory manner that Patty went on, 'You're very old, aren't you?'

"'So I be, miss, so I be,' said Father Christmas, nodding.

"'Father says you're eighteen hundred and thirty years old,' I muttered.

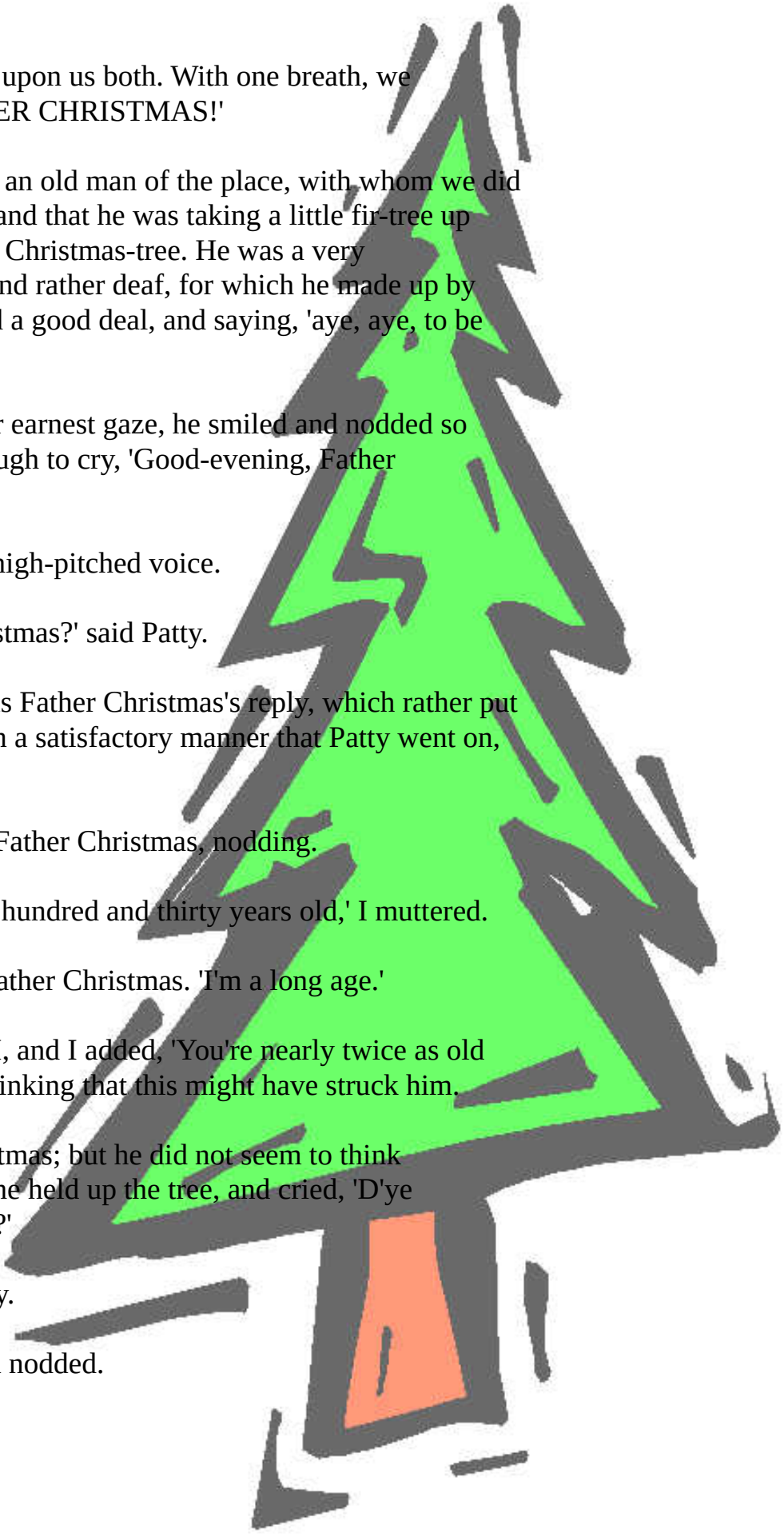
"'Aye, aye, to be sure,' said Father Christmas. 'I'm a long age.'

"A VERY long age, thought I, and I added, 'You're nearly twice as old as Methuselah, you know,' thinking that this might have struck him.

"'Aye, aye,' said Father Christmas; but he did not seem to think anything of it. After a pause he held up the tree, and cried, 'D'ye know what this is, little miss?'

"'A Christmas-tree,' said Patty.

"And the old man smiled and nodded.



"I leant over the wall, and shouted, 'But there are no candles.'

"'By and by,' said Father Christmas, nodding as before. 'When it's dark they'll all be lighted up. That'll be a fine sight!'

"'Toys, too,there'll be, won't there?' said Patty.

"Father Christmas nodded his head. 'And sweeties,' he added, expressively.

"I could feel Patty trembling, and my own heart beat fast. The thought which agitated us both was this: 'Was Father Christmas bringing the tree to us?' But very anxiety, and some modesty also, kept us from asking outright.

"Only when the old man shouldered his tree, and prepared to move on, I cried in despair, 'Oh, are you going?'

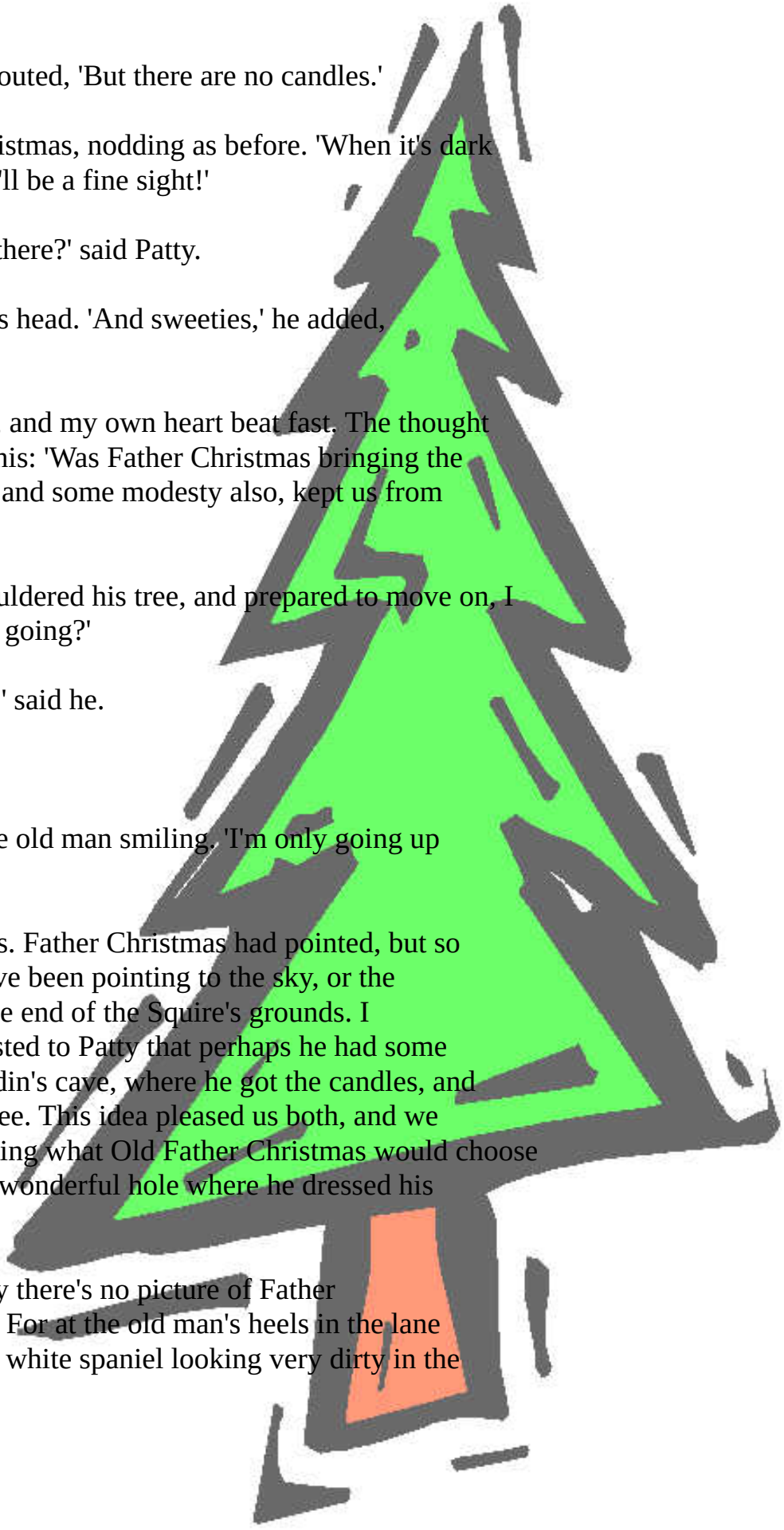
"'I'm coming back by and by,' said he.

"'How soon?' cried Patty.

"'About four o'clock,' said the old man smiling. 'I'm only going up yonder.'

"'Up yonder!' This puzzled us. Father Christmas had pointed, but so indefinitely that he might have been pointing to the sky, or the fields, or the little wood at the end of the Squire's grounds. I thought the latter, and suggested to Patty that perhaps he had some place underground like Aladdin's cave, where he got the candles, and all the pretty things for the tree. This idea pleased us both, and we amused ourselves by wondering what Old Father Christmas would choose for us from his stores in that wonderful hole where he dressed his Christmas-trees.

"'I wonder, Patty,' said I, 'why there's no picture of Father Christmas's dog in the book.' For at the old man's heels in the lane there crept a little brown and white spaniel looking very dirty in the snow.



"'Perhaps it's a new dog that he's got to take care of his cave,' said Patty.

"When we went indoors we examined the picture afresh by the dim light from the passage window, but there was no dog there.

"My father passed us at this moment, and patted my head. 'Father,' said I, 'I don't know, but I do think Old Father Christmas is going to bring us a Christmas-tree to-night.'

"'Who's been telling you that?' said my father.

But he passed on before I could explain that we had seen Father Christmas himself, and had had his word for it that he would return at four o'clock, and that the candles on his tree would be lighted as soon as it was dark.

"We hovered on the outskirts of the rooms till four o'clock came. We sat on the stairs and watched the big clock, which I was just learning to read; and Patty made herself giddy with constantly looking up and counting the four strokes, toward which the hour hand slowly moved. We put our noses into the kitchen now and then, to smell the cakes and get warm, and anon we hung about the parlour door, and were most unjustly accused of trying to peep. What did we care what our mother was doing in the parlour?--we, who had seen Old Father Christmas himself, and were expecting him back again every moment!

"At last the church clock struck. The sounds boomed heavily through the frost, and Patty thought there were four of them. Then, after due choking and whirring, our own clock struck, and we counted the strokes quite clearly--one! two! three! four! Then we got Kitty's shawl once more, and stole out into the backyard. We ran to our old place, and peeped, but could see nothing.

"'We'd better get up on to the wall,' I said; and with some difficulty and distress from rubbing her bare knees against the cold stone, and getting the snow up her sleeves, Patty got on to the coping of the little wall. I was just struggling after her, when something warm and

something cold coming suddenly against the bare calves of my legs made me shriek with fright. I came down 'with a run' and bruised my knees, my elbows, and my chin; and the snow that hadn't gone up Patty's sleeves went down my neck. Then I found that the cold thing was a dog's nose and the warm thing was his tongue; and Patty cried from her post of observation, 'It's Father Christmas's dog and he's licking your legs.'

"It really was the dirty little brown and white spaniel, and he persisted in licking me, and jumping on me, and making curious little noises, that must have meant something if one had known his language. I was rather harassed at the moment. My legs were sore, I was a little afraid of the dog, and Patty was very much afraid of sitting on the wall without me.

"'You won't fall,' I said to her. 'Get down, will you?' I said to the dog.

"'Humpty Dumpty fell off a wall,' said Patty.

"'Bow! wow!' said the dog.

"I pulled Patty down, and the dog tried to pull me down; but when my little sister was on her feet, to my relief, he transferred his attentions to her. When he had jumped at her, and licked her several times, he turned around and ran away.

"'He's gone,' said I; 'I'm so glad.'

"But even as I spoke he was back again, crouching at Patty's feet, and glaring at her with eyes the colour of his ears.

"Now, Patty was very fond of animals, and when the dog looked at her she looked at the dog, and then she said to me, 'He wants us to go with him.'

"On which (as if he understood our language, though we were ignorant of his) the spaniel sprang away, and went off as hard as he could; and Patty and I went after him, a dim hope crossing my mind--'Perhaps

Father Christmas has sent him for us.'

"The idea was rather favoured by the fact he led us up the lane. Only a little way; then he stopped by something lying in the ditch--and once more we cried in the same breath, 'It's Old Father Christmas!'

"Returning from the Hall, the old man had slipped upon a bit of ice, and lay stunned in the snow.

"Patty began to cry. 'I think he's dead!' she sobbed.

"'He is so very old, I don't wonder,' I murmured; 'but perhaps he's not. I'll fetch father.'

"My father and Kitty were soon on the spot. Kitty was as strong as a man; and they carried Father Christmas between them into the kitchen. There he quickly revived.

"I must do Kitty the justice to say that she did not utter a word of complaint at the disturbance of her labours; and that she drew the old man's chair close up to the oven with her own hand. She was so much affected by the behaviour of his dog that she admitted him even to the hearth; on which puss, being acute enough to see how matters stood, lay down with her back so close to the spaniel's that Kitty could not expel one without kicking both.

"For our parts, we felt sadly anxious about the tree; otherwise we could have wished for no better treat than to sit at Kitty's round table taking tea with Father Christmas. Our usual fare of thick bread and treacle was to-night exchanged for a delicious variety of cakes, which were none the worse to us for being 'tasters and wasters'--that is, little bits of dough, or shortbread, put in to try the state of the oven, and certain cakes that had got broken or burnt in the baking.

"Well, there we sat, helping Old Father Christmas to tea and cake, and wondering in our hearts what could have become of the tree.

"Patty and I felt a delicacy in asking Old Father Christmas about the tree. It was not until we had had tea three times round, with tasters

and wasters to match, that Patty said very gently: 'It's quite dark now.' And then she heaved a deep sigh.

"Burning anxiety overcame me. I leaned toward Father Christmas, and shouted--I had found out that it was needful to shout--"'I suppose the candles are on the tree now?'

"'Just about putting of 'em on,' said Father Christmas.

"'And the presents, too?' said Patty.

"'Aye, aye, TO be sure,' said Father Christmas, and he smiled delightfully.

"I was thinking what further questions I might venture upon, when he pushed his cup toward Patty saying, 'Since you are so pressing, miss, I'll take another dish.'

"And Kitty, swooping on us from the oven, cried, 'Make yourself at home, sir; there's more where these came from. Make a long arm, Miss Patty, and hand them cakes.'

"So we had to devote ourselves to the duties of the table; and Patty, holding the lid with one hand and pouring with the other, supplied Father Christmas's wants with a heavy heart.

"At last he was satisfied. I said grace, during which he stood, and, indeed, he stood for some time afterward with his eyes shut--I fancy under the impression that I was still speaking. He had just said a fervent 'amen,' and reseated himself, when my father put his head into the kitchen, and made this remarkable statement:

"'Old Father Christmas has sent a tree to the young people.'

"Patty and I uttered a cry of delight, and we forthwith danced round the old man, saying, 'How nice; Oh, how kind of you!' which I think must have bewildered him, but he only smiled and nodded.

"'Come along,' said my father. 'Come, children. Come, Reuben. Come,

Kitty.'

"And he went into the parlour, and we all followed him.

"My godmother's picture of a Christmas-tree was very pretty; and the flames of the candles were so naturally done in red and yellow that I always wondered that they did not shine at night. But the picture was nothing to the reality. We had been sitting almost in the dark, for, as Kitty said, 'Firelight was quite enough to burn at meal-times.' And when the parlour door was thrown open, and the tree, with lighted tapers on all the branches, burst upon our view, the blaze was dazzling, and threw such a glory round the little gifts, and the bags of coloured muslin, with acid drops and pink rose drops and comfits inside, as I shall never forget. We all got something; and Patty and I, at any rate, believed that the things came from the stores of Old Father Christmas. We were not undeceived even by his gratefully accepting a bundle of old clothes which had been hastily put together to form his present.

"We were all very happy; even Kitty, I think, though she kept her sleeves rolled up, and seemed rather to grudge enjoying herself (a weak point in some energetic characters). She went back to her oven before the lights were out and the angel on the top of the tree taken down. She locked up her present (a little work-box) at once. She often showed it off afterward, but it was kept in the same bit of tissue paper till she died. Our presents certainly did not last so long!

"The old man died about a week afterward, so we never made his acquaintance as a common personage. When he was buried, his little dog came to us. I suppose he remembered the hospitality he had received. Patty adopted him, and he was very faithful. Puss always looked on him with favour. I hoped during our rambles together in the following summer that he would lead us at last to the cave where Christmas-trees are dressed. But he never did.

"Our parents often spoke of his late master as 'old Reuben,' but children are not easily disabused of a favourite fancy, and in Patty's thoughts and in mine the old man was long gratefully remembered as Old Father Christmas."

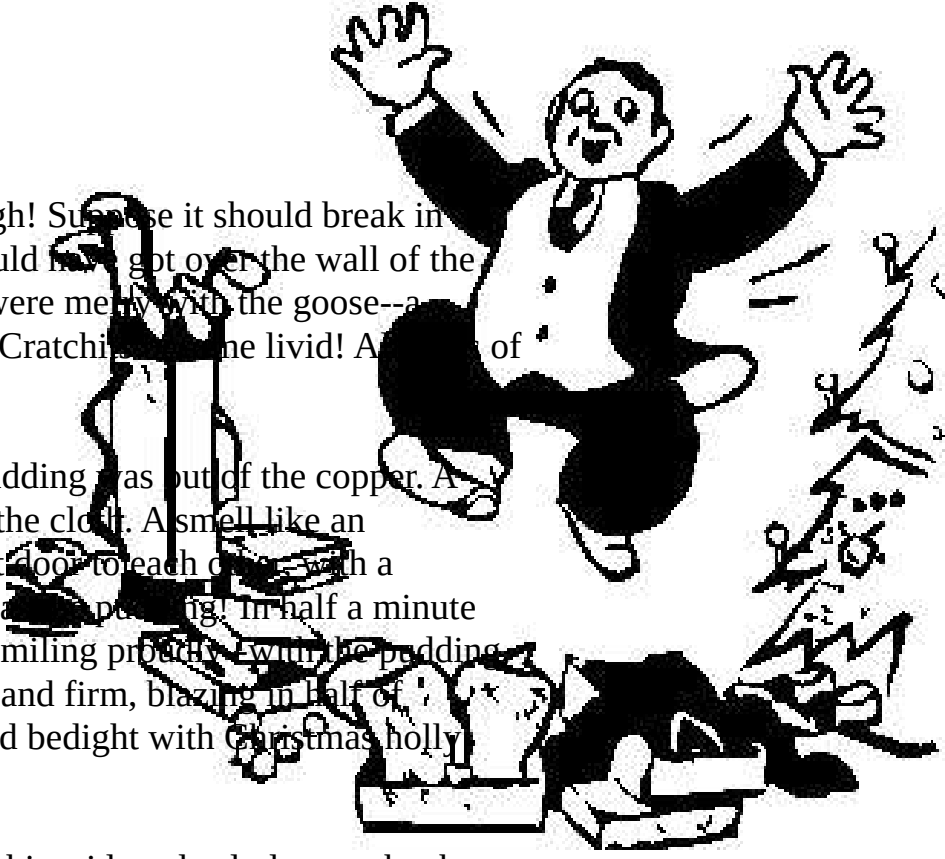
A CHRISTMAS CAROL

CHARLES DICKENS

Master Peter, and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; a feathered phenomenon, to which a black swan was a matter of course--and in truth it was something very like it in that house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy (ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by the apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), they hadn't ate it all at last! Yet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular, were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows! But now, the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone--too nervous to bear witnesses--to take the pudding up and bring it in.



Suppose it should not be done enough! Suppose it should break in turning out. Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back-yard and stolen it, while they were merry with the goose--a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid! All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Hallo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastrycook's next-door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the pudding! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered--flushed, but smiling proudly--with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been, flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glasses. Two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and cracked noisily. Then Bob proposed:

"A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!"

Which all the family re-echoed.

"God bless us every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

XXI. HOW CHRISTMAS CAME TO THE SANTA MARIA FLATS*

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ELIA W. PEATTIE

There were twenty-six flat children, and none of them had ever been flat children until that year. Previously they had all been home children. and as such had, of course, had beautiful Christmases, in which their relations with Santa Claus had been of the most intimate and personal nature.

Now, owing to their residence in the Santa Maria flats, and the Lease, all was changed. The Lease was a strange forbiddance, a ukase issued by a tyrant, which took from children their natural liberties and rights.

Though, to be sure--as every one of the flat children knew--they were in the greatest kind of luck to be allowed to live at all, and especially were they fortunate past the lot of children to be permitted to live in a flat. There were many flats in the great city, so polished and carved and burnished and be-lackeyed that children were not allowed to enter within the portals, save on visits of ceremony in charge of parents or governesses. And in one flat, where Cecil de Koven le Baron was born--just by accident and without intending any harm--he was evicted, along with his parents, by the time he reached the age where he seemed likely to be graduated from the go-cart. And yet that flat had not nearly so imposing a name as the Santa Maria.

The twenty-six children of the Santa Maria flats belonged to twenty families. All of these twenty families were peculiar, as you might learn any day by interviewing the families concerning one another. But they bore with each other's peculiarities quite cheerfully and spoke in

the hall when they met. Sometimes this tolerance would even extend to conversation about the janitor, a thin creature who did the work of five men. The ladies complained that he never smiled.

"I wouldn't so much mind the hot water pipes leaking now and then," the ladies would remark in the vestibule, rustling their skirts to show that they wore silk petticoats, "if only the janitor would smile. But he looks like a cemetery."

"I know it," would be the response. "I told Mr. Wilberforce last night that if he would only get a cheerful janitor I wouldn't mind our having rubber instead of Axminster on the stairs."

"You know we were promised Axminster when we moved in," would be the plaintive response. The ladies would stand together for a moment wrapped in gloomy reflection, and then part.

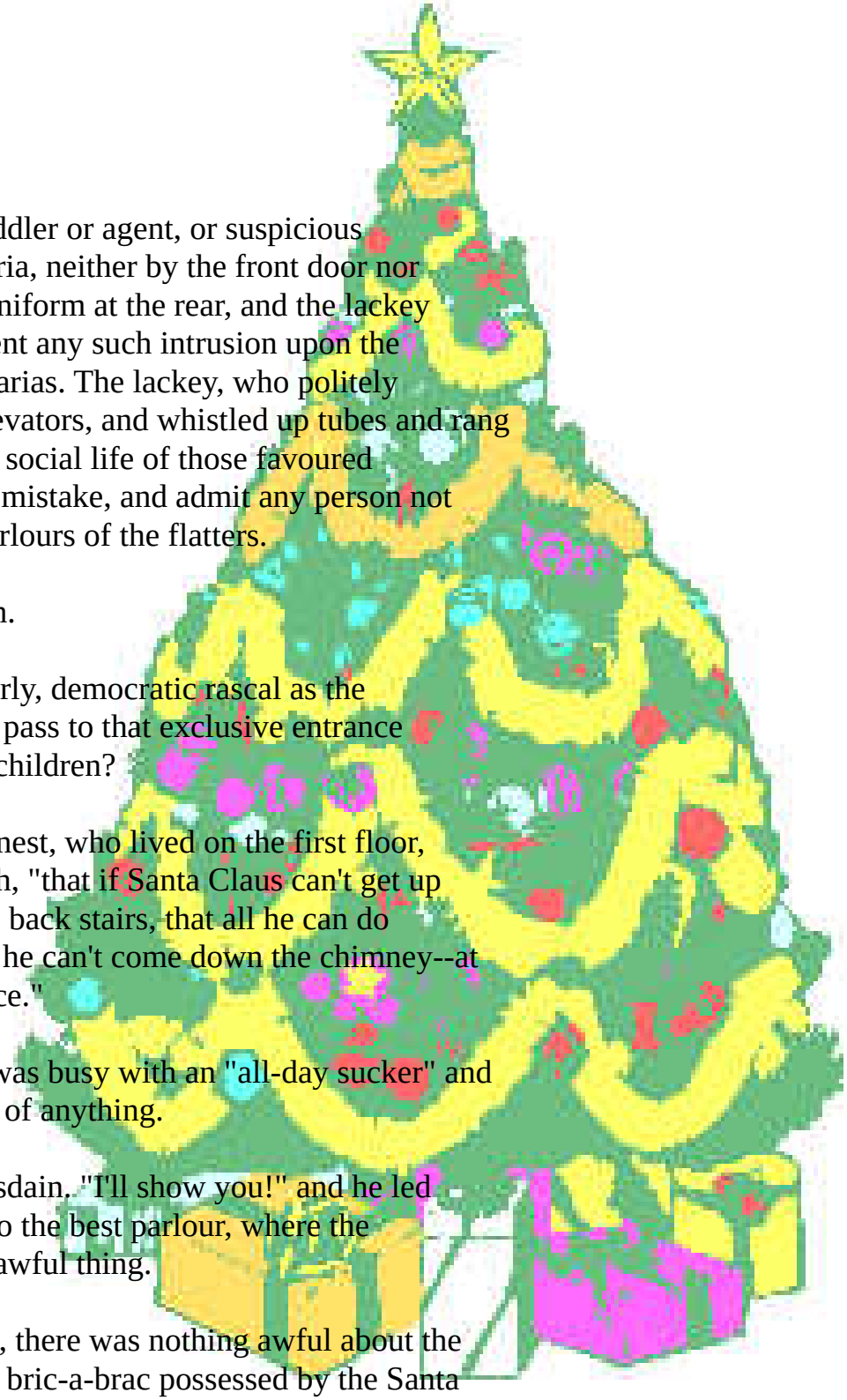
The kitchen and nurse maids felt on the subject, too.

"If Carl Carlsen would only smile," they used to exclaim in sibilant whispers, as they passed on the way to the laundry. "If he'd come in an' joke while we wus washin'!"

Only Kara Johnson never said anything on the subject because she knew why Carlsen didn't smile, and was sorry for it, and would have made it all right--if it hadn't been for Lars Larsen.

Dear, dear, but this is a digression from the subject of the Lease. That terrible document was held over the heads of the children as the Herodian pronunciamento concerning small boys was over the heads of the Israelites.

It was in the Lease not to run--not to jump--not to yell. It was in the Lease not to sing in the halls, not to call from story to story, not to slide down the banisters. And there were blocks of banisters so smooth and wide and beautiful that the attraction between them and the seats of the little boy's trousers was like the attraction of a magnet for a nail. Yet not a leg, crooked or straight, fat or thin, was ever to be thrown over these polished surfaces!



It was in the Lease, too, that no peddler or agent, or suspicious stranger was to enter the Santa Maria, neither by the front door nor the back. The janitor stood in his uniform at the rear, and the lackey in his uniform at the front, to prevent any such intrusion upon the privacy of the aristocratic Santa Marias. The lackey, who politely directed people, and summoned elevators, and whistled up tubes and rang bells, thus conducting the complex social life of those favoured apartments, was not one to make a mistake, and admit any person not calculated to ornament the front parlours of the flatters.

It was this that worried the children.

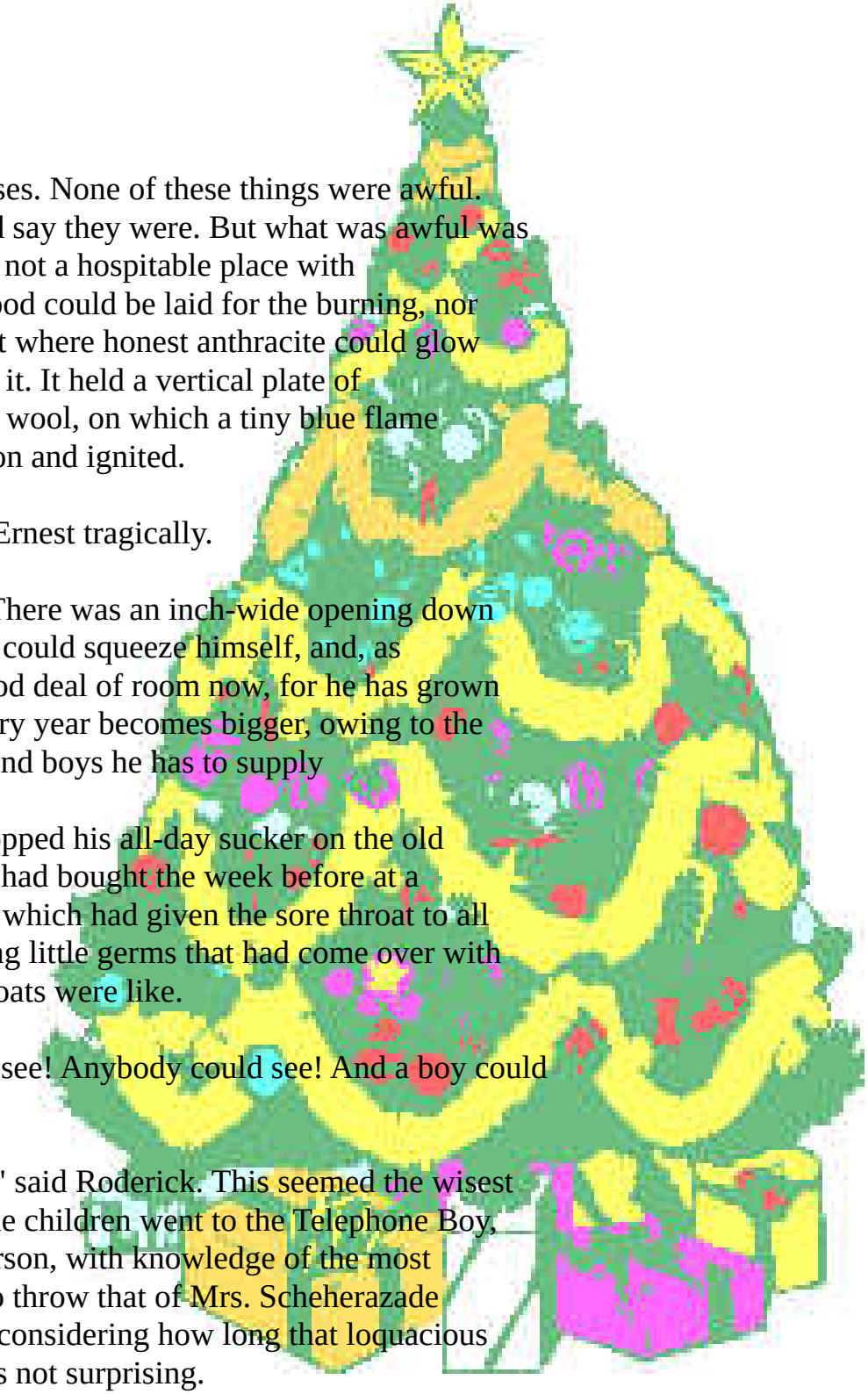
For how could such a dear, disorderly, democratic rascal as the children's saint ever hope to gain a pass to that exclusive entrance and get up to the rooms of the flat children?

"You can see for yourself," said Ernest, who lived on the first floor, to Roderick who lived on the fourth, "that if Santa Claus can't get up the front stairs, and can't get up the back stairs, that all he can do is to come down the chimney. And he can't come down the chimney--at least, he can't get out of the fireplace."

"Why not?" asked Roderick, who was busy with an "all-day sucker" and not inclined to take a gloomy view of anything.

"Goosey!" cried Ernest, in great disdain. "I'll show you!" and he led Roderick, with his sucker, right into the best parlour, where the fireplace was, and showed him an awful thing.

Of course, to the ordinary observer, there was nothing awful about the fireplace. Everything in the way of bric-a-brac possessed by the Santa Maria flatters was artistic. It may have been in the Lease that only people with esthetic tastes were to be admitted to the apartments. However that may be, the fireplace, with its vases and pictures and trinkets, was something quite wonderful. Indian incense burned in a mysterious little dish, pictures of purple ladies were hung in odd corners, calendars in letters nobody could read, served to decorate, if not to educate, and glass vases of strange colours and extraordinary



shapes stood about filled with roses. None of these things were awful. At least no one would have dared say they were. But what was awful was the formation of the grate. It was not a hospitable place with andirons, where noble logs of wood could be laid for the burning, nor did it have a generous iron basket where honest anthracite could glow away into the nights. Not a bit of it. It held a vertical plate of stuff that looked like dirty cotton wool, on which a tiny blue flame leaped when the gas was turned on and ignited.

"You can see for yourself!" said Ernest tragically.

Roderick could see for himself. There was an inch-wide opening down which the Friend of the Children could squeeze himself, and, as everybody knows, he needs a good deal of room now, for he has grown portly with age, and his pack every year becomes bigger, owing to the ever-increasing number of girls and boys he has to supply

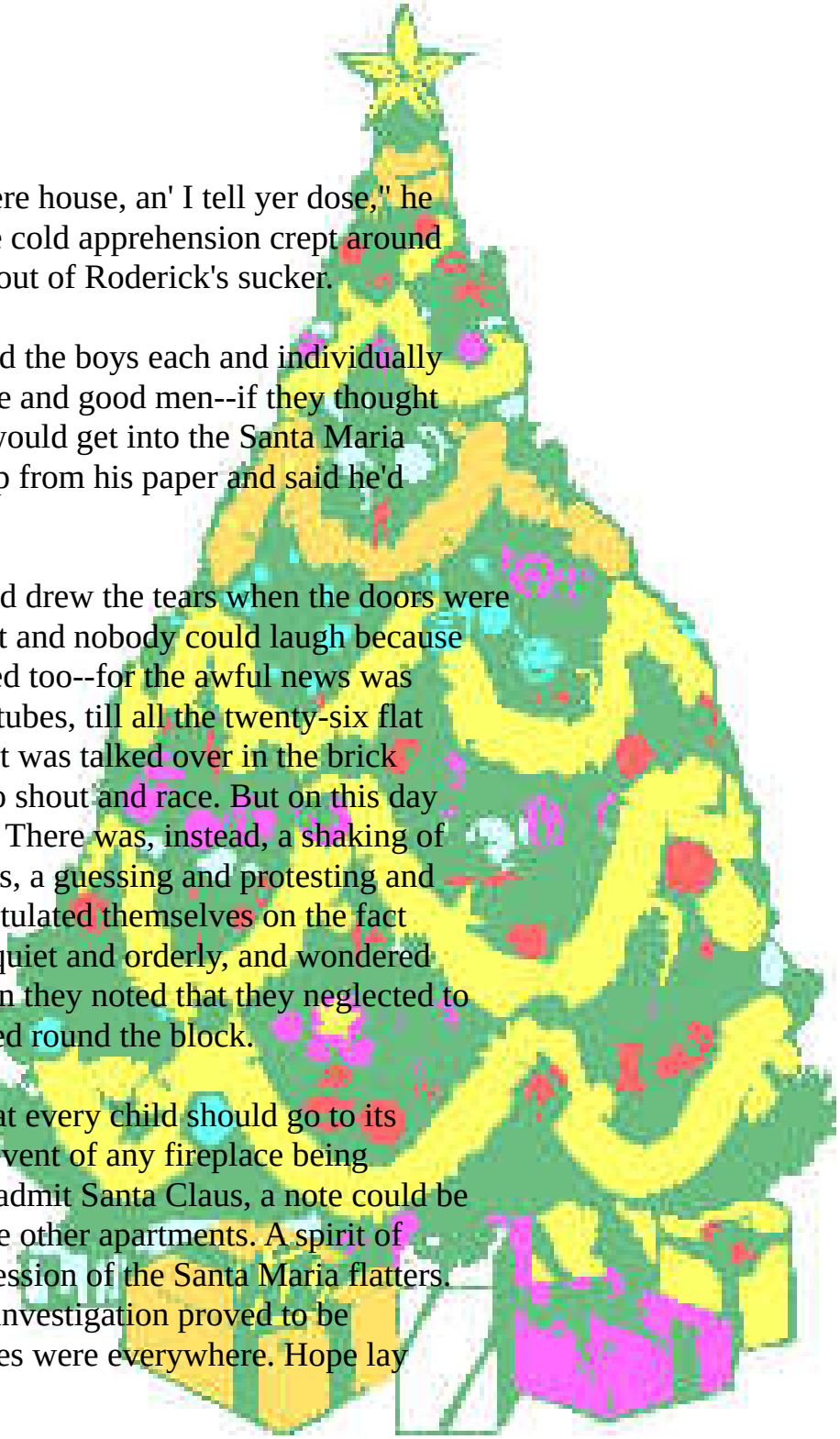
"Gimini!" said Roderick, and dropped his all-day sucker on the old Bokara rug that Ernest's mamma had bought the week before at a fashionable furnishing shop, and which had given the sore throat to all the family, owing to some cunning little germs that had come over with the rug to see what American throats were like.

Oh, me, yes! but Roderick could see! Anybody could see! And a boy could see better than anybody.

"Let's go see the Telephone Boy," said Roderick. This seemed the wisest thing to do. When in doubt, all the children went to the Telephone Boy, who was the most fascinating person, with knowledge of the most wonderful kind and of a nature to throw that of Mrs. Scheherazade quite, quite in the shade--which, considering how long that loquacious lady had been a Shade, is perhaps not surprising.

The Telephone Boy knew the answers to all the conundrums in the world, and a way out of nearly all troubles such as are likely to overtake boys and girls. But now he had no suggestions to offer and could speak no comfortable words.

"He can't git inter de front, an' he can't git inter de back, an' he



can't come down no chimney in dis here house, an' I tell yer dose," he said, and shut his mouth grimly, while cold apprehension crept around Ernest's heart and took the sweetness out of Roderick's sucker.

Nevertheless, hope springs eternal, and the boys each and individually asked their fathers--tremendously wise and good men--if they thought there was any hope that Santa Claus would get into the Santa Maria flats, and each of the fathers looked up from his paper and said he'd be blessed if he did!

And the words sunk deep and deep and drew the tears when the doors were closed and the soft black was all about and nobody could laugh because a boy was found crying! The girls cried too--for the awful news was whistled up tubes and whistled down tubes, till all the twenty-six flat children knew about it. The next day it was talked over in the brick court, where the children used to go to shout and race. But on this day there was neither shouting nor racing. There was, instead, a shaking of heads, a surreptitious dropping of tears, a guessing and protesting and lamenting. All the flat mothers congratulated themselves on the fact that their children were becoming so quiet and orderly, and wondered what could have come over them when they noted that they neglected to run after the patrol wagon as it whizzed round the block.

It was decided, after a solemn talk, that every child should go to its own fireplace and investigate. In the event of any fireplace being found with an opening big enough to admit Santa Claus, a note could be left directing him along the halls to the other apartments. A spirit of universal brotherhood had taken possession of the Santa Maria flatters. Misery bound them together. But the investigation proved to be disheartening. The cruel asbestos grates were everywhere. Hope lay strangled!

As time went on, melancholy settled upon the flat children. The parents noted it, and wondered if there could be sewer gas in the apartments. One over-anxious mother called in a physician, who gave the poor little child some medicine which made it quite ill. No one suspected the truth, though the children were often heard to say that it was evident that there was to be no Christmas for them! But then, what more natural for a child to say, thus hoping to win protestations--so the mothers

reasoned, and let the remark pass.

The day before Christmas was gray and dismal. There was no wind--indeed, there was a sort of tightness in the air, as if the supply of freshness had given out. People had headaches--even the Telephone Boy was cross--and none of the spirit of the time appeared to enliven the flat children. There appeared to be no stir--no mystery. No whisperings went on in the corners--or at least, so it seemed to the sad babies of the Santa Maria.

"It's as plain as a monkey on a hand-organ," said the Telephone Boy to the attendants at his salon in the basement, "that there ain't to be no Christmas for we--no, not for we!"

Had not Dorothy produced, at this junction, from the folds of her fluffy silken skirts several substantial sticks of gum, there is no saying to what depths of discouragement the flat children would have fallen!

About six o'clock it seemed as if the children would smother for lack of air! It was very peculiar. Even the janitor noticed it. He spoke about it to Kara at the head of the back stairs, and she held her hand so as to let him see the new silver ring on her fourth finger, and he let go of the rope on the elevator on which he was standing and dropped to the bottom of the shaft, so that Kara sent up a wild hallo of alarm. But the janitor emerged as melancholy and unruffled as ever, only looking at his watch to see if it had been stopped by the concussion.

The Telephone Boy, who usually got a bit of something hot sent down to him from one of the tables, owing to the fact that he never ate any meal save breakfast at home, was quite forgotten on this day, and dined off two russet apples, and drew up his belt to stop the ache--for the Telephone Boy was growing very fast indeed, in spite of his poverty, and couldn't seem to stop growing somehow, although he said to himself every day that it was perfectly brutal of him to keep on that way when his mother had so many mouths to feed.

Well, well, the tightness of the air got worse. Every one was cross at dinner and complained of feeling tired afterward, and of wanting to go

to bed. For all of that it was not to get to sleep, and the children tossed and tumbled for a long time before they put their little hands in the big, soft shadowy clasp of the Sandman, and trooped away after him to the happy town of sleep.

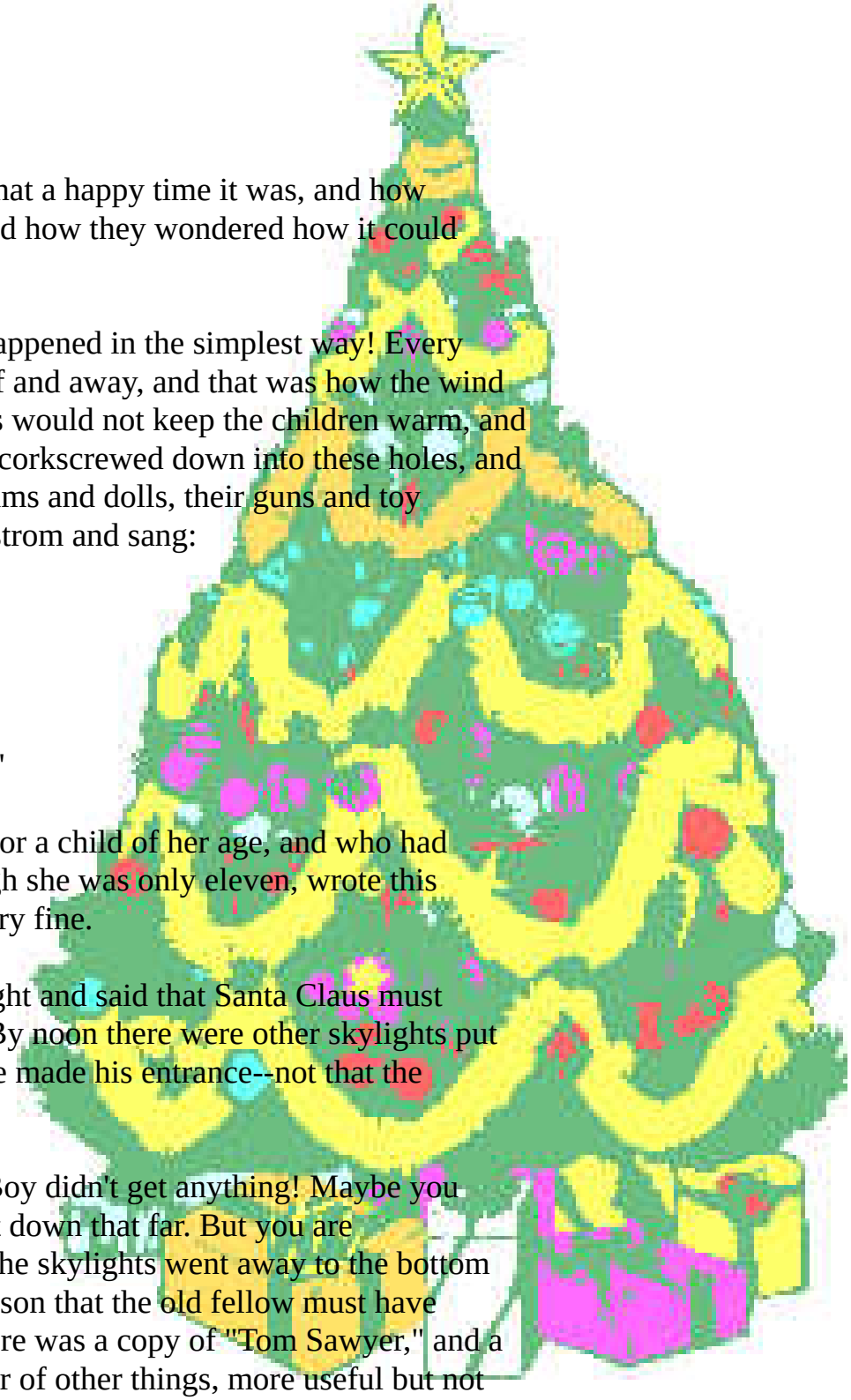
It seemed to the flat children that they had been asleep but a few moments when there came a terrible burst of wind that shook even that great house to its foundations. Actually, as they sat up in bed and called to their parents or their nurses, their voices seemed smothered with roar. Could it be that the wind was a great wild beast with a hundred tongues which licked at the roof of the building? And how many voices must it have to bellow as it did?

Sounds of falling glass, of breaking shutters, of crashing chimneys greeted their ears--not that they knew what all these sounds meant. They only knew that it seemed as if the end of the world had come. Ernest, miserable as he was, wondered if the Telephone Boy had gotten safely home, or if he were alone in the draughty room in the basement; and Roderick hugged his big brother, who slept with him and said, "Now I lay me," three times running, as fast as ever his tongue would say it.

After a terrible time the wind settled down into a steady howl like a hungry wolf, and the children went to sleep, worn out with fright and conscious that the bedclothes could not keep out the cold.

Dawn came. The children awoke, shivering. They sat up in bed and looked about them--yes, they did, the whole twenty-six of them in their different apartments and their different homes. And what do you suppose they saw--what do you suppose the twenty-six flat children saw as they looked about them?

Why, stockings, stuffed full, and trees hung full, and boxes packed full! Yes, they did! It was Christmas morning, and the bells were ringing, and all the little flat children were laughing, for Santa Claus had come! He had really come! In the wind and wild weather, while the tongues of the wind licked hungrily at the roof, while the wind howled like a hungry wolf, he had crept in somehow and laughing, no doubt, and chuckling, without question, he had filled the stockings and the trees and the boxes! Dear me, dear me, but it was a happy time! It



makes me out of breath to think what a happy time it was, and how surprised the flat children were, and how they wondered how it could ever have happened.

But they found out, of course! It happened in the simplest way! Every skylight in the place was blown off and away, and that was how the wind howled so, and how the bedclothes would not keep the children warm, and how Santa Claus got in. The wind corkscrewed down into these holes, and the reckless children with their drums and dolls, their guns and toy dishes, danced around in the maelstrom and sang:

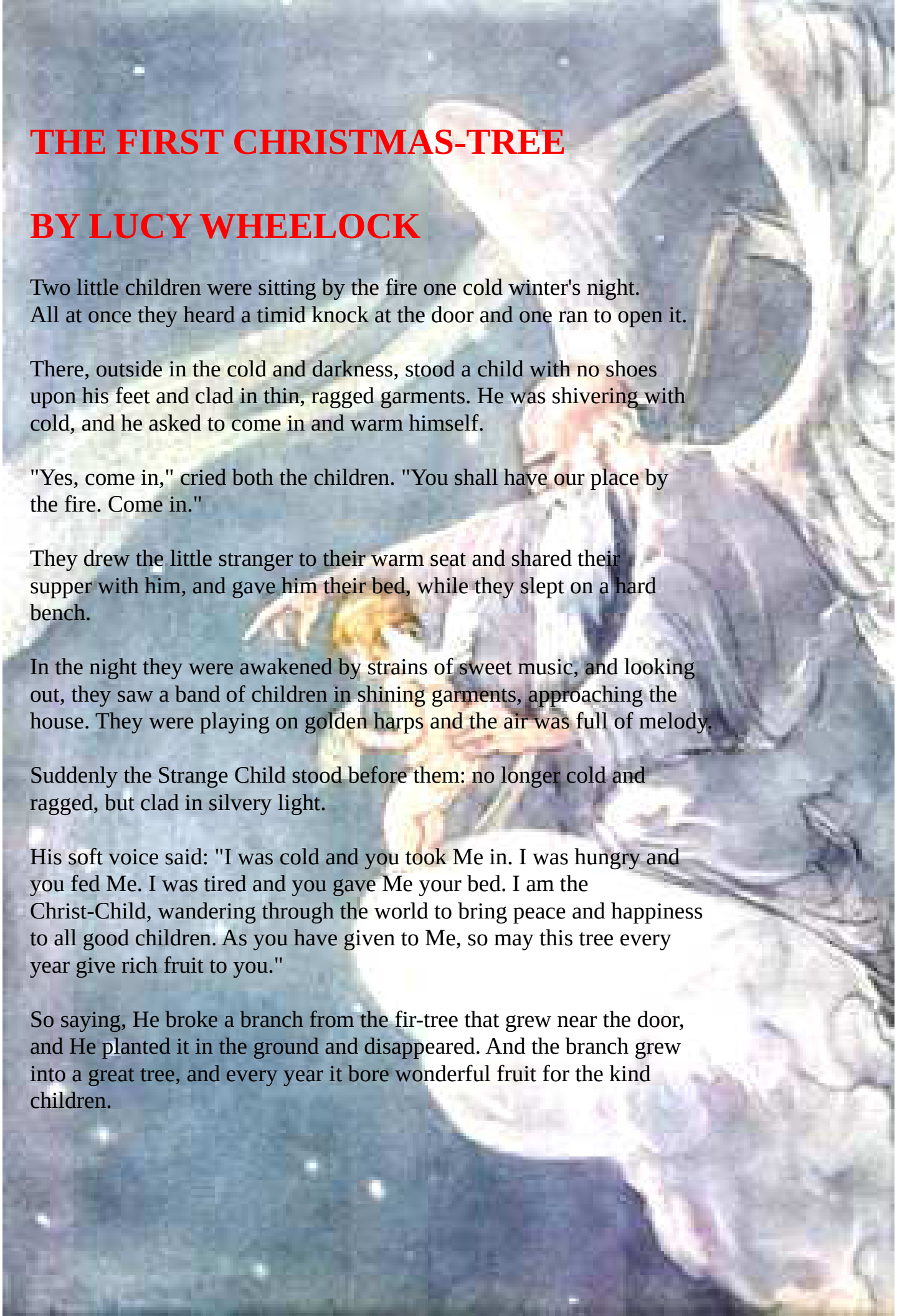
"Here's where Santa Claus came!
This is how he got in-
We should count it a sin
Yes, count it a shame,
If it hurt when he fell on the floor."

Roderick's sister, who was clever for a child of her age, and who had read Monte Cristo ten times, though she was only eleven, wrote this poem, which every one thought very fine.

And of course all the parents thought and said that Santa Claus must have jumped down the skylights. By noon there were other skylights put in, and not a sign left of the way he made his entrance--not that the way mattered a bit, no, not a bit.

Perhaps you think the Telephone Boy didn't get anything! Maybe you imagine that Santa Claus didn't get down that far. But you are mistaken. The shaft below one of the skylights went away to the bottom of the building, and it stands to reason that the old fellow must have fallen way through. At any rate there was a copy of "Tom Sawyer," and a whole plum pudding, and a number of other things, more useful but not so interesting, found down in the chilly basement room. There were, indeed.

In closing it is only proper to mention that Kara Johnson crocheted a white silk four-in-hand necktie for Carl Carlsen, the janitor--and the janitor smiled!



THE FIRST CHRISTMAS-TREE

BY LUCY WHEELOCK

Two little children were sitting by the fire one cold winter's night. All at once they heard a timid knock at the door and one ran to open it.

There, outside in the cold and darkness, stood a child with no shoes upon his feet and clad in thin, ragged garments. He was shivering with cold, and he asked to come in and warm himself.

"Yes, come in," cried both the children. "You shall have our place by the fire. Come in."

They drew the little stranger to their warm seat and shared their supper with him, and gave him their bed, while they slept on a hard bench.

In the night they were awakened by strains of sweet music, and looking out, they saw a band of children in shining garments, approaching the house. They were playing on golden harps and the air was full of melody.

Suddenly the Strange Child stood before them: no longer cold and ragged, but clad in silvery light.

His soft voice said: "I was cold and you took Me in. I was hungry and you fed Me. I was tired and you gave Me your bed. I am the Christ-Child, wandering through the world to bring peace and happiness to all good children. As you have given to Me, so may this tree every year give rich fruit to you."

So saying, He broke a branch from the fir-tree that grew near the door, and He planted it in the ground and disappeared. And the branch grew into a great tree, and every year it bore wonderful fruit for the kind children.