

A CHILD'S CHRISTMAS DAY.



HE OPENS HIS EYES, WITH A CRY OF DELIGHT. THERE'S A TOYSHOP ALL ROUND HIM, A WONDERFUL SIGHT! THE FAIRIES HAVE CERTAINLY CALLED IN THE NIGHT.



THEY ARE QUIET AT FIRST—BOTH THE GIRL AND THE BOY. TOO HAPPY TO MAKE ANY NOISE OR NOISE. AND THEY MENTALLY SHOW TO EACH OTHER THEIR TOYS.



BUT NOT IN THE SURREY A TERRIBLE RACKET! THE DOLLS JOSE THEIR BEDS, THERE ARE RUNS IN EACH JACKET. AND IF YOU'RE A TOY IT'S THE FASHION TO CRACK IT.



THE FLOOR IS ALL LITTERED WITH SIGNS OF THE FAY. HE IS SLEEPY AND TIRED WITH SNAKE EATING AND PLAY. AND, BUT, TOO, IN A FEW AS SHE HEARS HIM AWAY.

MASO NAPONE.

A CHRISTMAS TALE BY J. COLOMB.

It had been snowing all day. Intense cold had succeeded, and the stars, shining brightly, looked down on the good old town of Nuremberg.

The people were coming out of their dwellings and walking slowly but cheerfully along the streets, not coming to mind the crisp cold nor the deep snow under their feet. There was a murmur of voices, a rustling of garments, the sounds of doors opening and shutting, mingled with laughter and merry shouting.

The throng of people had passed on, and the voices of the bells had become more reverberations, when a little girl about five years old appeared in the principal street, which was now silent and deserted. She was alone and looked so small as she walked faintly along, taking short steps, so as not to slip on the hard, gleaming snow, and singing in a soft voice an old Christmas hymn about the angels. Both-lahem and a child asleep in a manger.

Suddenly she stopped, uttered a cry of dismay, and falling on her knees began searching for something in the snow. She



"GOOD ANGEL, I PRAY THEE!" WAS EVIDENTLY UNSUCCESSFUL, HOWEVER, FOR HER EYES CHANGED TO TEARS, AND HER GRIEF INCREASED UNTIL IT FOUND VENT IN Sobs.

winning, happy or bold, a lad about 15 years old, dressed unlike any one in Nuremberg, with dark blue breeches, a short cloak on his shoulders and a little red cap on his black hair. He carried a musical instrument and touched the strings as he glided up at a house where a light was gleaming. The child did not understand the stranger's words, and feeling sure that he was using the language of heaven she threw herself at his feet, clasped her hands and raised her eyes entreatingly to his face.

"Good angel, I pray thee," she cried, "help me to find my gruschen!"

"Thy gruschen, little one? What sayest thou?" he answered, speaking with a strange accent. "Why dost thou call me thy good angel—me, a poor Italian singer?"

"Is that true?" asked the child, still in doubt.

"Indeed, yes," he answered. "I saw a light in this fine house and thought that if I sang I might be offered a night's shelter, but all seems to be silent."

"Every one but the sick lady and her servant have gone to church," explained the little girl, and her lower lip quivered.

"Then I shall go there too. And what wilt thou do?"

At this question the child, remembering her loss, began to cry again, and the lad took her hand in his, and stroking it asked gently:

"What is the trouble, little one? Tell me, and if I can help you I will." He smiled cheerfully as he spoke, and the child answered:

"I have lost my money, my gruschen. We never have anything nice for supper, but because it is Christmas time my mother gave me the money to buy a sausage and an apple pie, but I have dropped my gruschen in the snow. We have no more, and now we can have no Christmas supper."

"Where did you drop it?" asked her listener, and when she pointed to the spot he knelt down and began turning over the snow, when he gave a cry of triumph and held up a coin in his fingers.

"Oh, you must be an angel!" cried the little girl joyfully, and he added, with a smile:

"A Florentine angel, then. My name is Maso Napone—remember it. Now, goodbye. Go buy your supper."

"Not until I have been to the midnight mass," replied the girl. "My mother is ill, so I must go and pray for her."

"Then I will go with you," said Maso, taking her hand. "What is your name?"

"Christine Luchs. My mother is the Widow Gudula."

"How little thing! Do you remember your father?"

"Perfectly. He used to hush me to sleep by the fire every night, and sometimes I seem to feel his arms round me still. Ah, how well he loved me!"

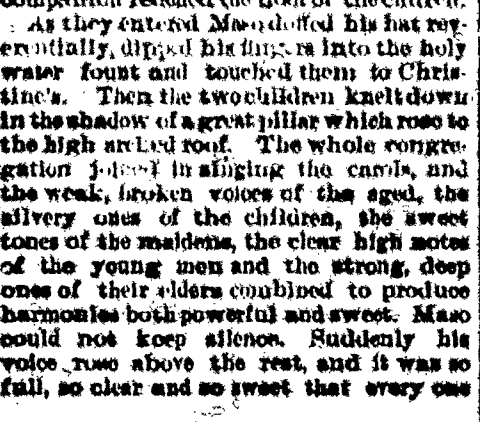
"Your mother has to work?"

"Yes, she does beautiful embroidery. I do a little of it, but I have not learned to work very well yet. Pretty soon I shall do it better, and then mamma can rest."

"I am all alone in the world," said the youth when Christine stopped speaking. "I have no parents, no money, no home. My father's creditors took everything except my life, so I left Florence, and now I earn a little money by singing in the streets, but I often have to sleep in the open air and without supper, but I am very strong, so I do not mind it, and I have many happy hours. Beautiful ladies call me into their houses to sing to their guests, and then I am well treated and well fed."

The little girl nodded approvingly, as if such conduct were the most natural in the world, and at that moment she and her companion reached the door of the church.

As they entered Maso doffed his hat reverentially, dipped his fingers into the holy water fount and touched them to Christine's. Then the two children knelt down in the shadow of a great pillar which rose to the high arched roof. The whole congregation joined in singing the carols, and the weak, broken voices of the aged, the silvery tones of the children, the sweet tones of the maidens, the clear high notes of the young men and the strong, deep ones of their fathers combined to produce harmonies both powerful and sweet. Maso could not keep silence. Suddenly his voice rose above the rest, and it was so full, so clear and so sweet that every one



THE LAD BEGAN TO SING.

turned to look at him. A tall man wrapped in a great cloak left his place, and coming nearer to the lad listened attentively, with his eyes fixed upon Maso's face as long as he continued to sing. Neither of the children noticed the stranger.

"Poor me!" Maso thought. "No one on earth loves me, no one cares who becomes of me. If I should die tonight, there would be not one to shed a tear for me. I am all alone. This little girl, who mistakes me for an angel will return to her home and never see her mother's kin, but I do not know what a mother is. I would give anything to have one like her."

Then silence fell upon him without his knowing it, and Christine, seeing this, said to herself:

"He is crying. There he is not an angel. Poor boy, how I pity him! He is so lonely!"

A few moments later the boy and the girl were outside the church again.

"Why were you crying?" asked Christine, and the lad replied:

"I was thinking how sad it was to have no mother. God grant you may long have yours, little one! Do not look so sorry, but come and let us buy your supper in some of these shops. See, I am not cold now!"

He led her into a provision shop, and not allowing her to spend her only coin purchased her, fruit and pastry for her, and then, seeing that she shivered in the cold night air, he took off his own cloak and put it round her shoulders.

"Now I will take you home," he said, and when they reached her door she asked wistfully: "Will you not come in and have supper with us, as if you were my brother?"

"Mamma will be so glad!" Maso followed her in and was welcomed by the Widow Gudula. "While they wait to supper Maso told them of his childhood's home in Italy, which had been captured, but he had been rescued, as his father's

ruin and death and of his own wanderings.

"And no, mother, he sings. You should hear him!" The angels in heaven have not sweeter voices," exclaimed Christine, and she led him up his little, crooked, old, creaking ladder, then began to sing, while the mother and daughter listened with clasped hands and tearful eyes. As soon as he stopped there was a knock at the door. Christine opened it fearfully, for there was nothing in that poor home for robbers. Outside stood the tall man who had been in church. He recognized the child and smiled as he said:

"My dear, I want to speak to your brother, who has just been singing."

"He is not my brother," said Christine, surprised.

"No! Well, it does not matter. I want to see the lad who was in church with you. Tell him Master Kriegswinkel wants him a minute."

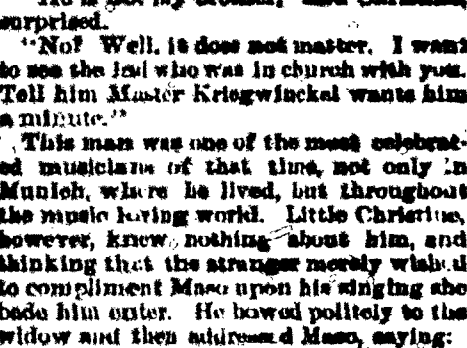


well, for if she did not seem to be a man why was she so beautiful in the tender glances, sighs and words of the young men?

At the people entered the church the organ's peals rose to the vaulted roof, and Widow Gudula, kneeling at Christine's side, heard her murmured prayer: "Woe! Barren Jesus, protect him! Bring him back to us that I may tell him I have not forgotten him!"

The mother smiled sadly, for she had had experience of the world, and she knew that with young persons, remembrance often fades.

Suddenly, just as the priest began to administer communion to the



A VOICE IN THE CHURCH.

faithful, a voice in the choir sang above the organ's strains, and Christine's face was transfigured as she whispered: "It is he!"

"Oh, that beautiful voice, powerful, impetuous, yet so sweet as if it came straight from heaven!"

"Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth," he sang, and Christine, carried out of herself as she listened, with ecstasy and wondered whether it were not indeed an angel's voice. With a sudden look to her only son she followed her mother's eye of the moment and saw a young man in a white cassock, who had been kneeling in prayer, rise up and sing the first verse of the Mass.

Who else had recognized through the window her daughter away. When they reached the street, no strange figure was to be seen, except a tall man wrapped in a handsome cloak and wearing a gold embroidered cap which gleamed in the moonlight. When the two women arrived at their home, this person stepped quickly up, and with a bow said:

"Merry Christmas to you, Dame Gudula! Merry Christmas, little Christine! Will you let the Florentine singer share your supper once again?"

"I know he would come, mother!" said Christine, and the widow, in spite of her misgivings, almost against her will added: "He is welcome, as before."

They all entered the house, and when the girl had lighted the candles on the supper table she was astonished to see that the slender smiling man had become a strong, handsome man, who looked at her with smiling admiration. Her simple yet well fitting gown showed off her graceful figure to advantage. While she fixed her gaze Maso said to her: "One might take you for an angel now."

Then he related how Master Kriegswinkel had brought him up and taught him and then a father to him. The old man was dead now, and Maso once more revealed about to earn his living by singing. But he went on a great venture, and a few weeks ago, Kriegswinkel had called on him to come and sing to him, and he had accepted the offer.

"I have always thought of you, and I love you, Christine, my little sister," he said, "and now I am here, and you are no longer a poor girl."

"Remember," he murmured the girl, while her mother smiled and nodded.

"You promised me to love me and to be my brother," he said, taking her hand. "I have always thought of you, and I love you, Christine, my little sister," he said, "and now I am here, and you are no longer a poor girl."

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