



SANTA and the MUSIC BOX

BY LUCRECE HUDGINS



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Chapter 1

Once, long ago, there was a happy land called Cameroon and the King who ruled there was so wise and so kind that, truly, there was no sorrow in all that kingdom.

It was a land of plenty where there was work for all and food for all. The children grew up in health and happiness and it seemed that the sun was always shining.

Beautiful gardens surrounded the King's palace, and in the summertime, anyone who wished could come in and walk among the flowers. In the wintertime, the palace itself was open to all who chose to come in and warm themselves before the fires which always blazed on the great open hearths.

The King had a little daughter named Ruth and in all that kingdom of happy people, little Ruth was, perhaps, the happiest. Her eyes were always laughing and bright with the mere pleasure of being alive. It might be said that Ruth did not know even the meaning of sorrow.

Every year the King gave a great Christmas Festival for all his people. He raised a giant fir tree in the palace courtyard and decorated it with silver balls and blue candles. And beneath the tree he laid magnificent presents for his people. Then everyone in the kingdom gathered for singing and dancing and feasting.

How the children and grownups alike loved these Festivals! They talked of nothing else for weeks ahead and for weeks afterwards. They loved their King and the Princess Ruth and knew how fortunate they were to have such people ruling in their land.

Now everything went well in Cameroon until the Princess Ruth was ten years old. In that year, exactly three weeks before Christmas, a very terrible thing happened. The little Princess fell ill.

"What can be the matter with her?" cried the King as he sat beside the child's bed and held her hot hand in his.

The best doctors in the land were there but they could only gaze sorrowfully at one another and shake their heads.

"It is the fever," they said. "The poor Princess will never smile again."

"But that can't be!" protested the King. Indeed, he could not imagine his happy daughter without a smile on her lips.

But the doctors persisted. "You see," explained the eldest doctor. "When the fever comes it squeezes the heart into a tight knot and there is no room for laughter. No, not even

room for a smile." He paused to wipe his eyes, then said, "And the heart that has no joy soon stops beating."

"You mean my child will die?" cried the King.

"Yes," said the doctor. "She will surely die unless she smiles within three weeks, that is to say, a good big smile - at least a three-inch smile."

Then the doctors went away. For three days and three nights the King sat by his child's bed. On the fourth day the fever was gone and the little girl could sit up by herself. But, what a different child she was!

The King could scarcely recognize her, so sad were her eyes and so solemn the little mouth.

"Tell me, little daughter," begged the King, "tell me what I can give you to make you happy. Think, surely, you must be able to think of something that would make you smile again!"

But Ruth shook her head. "My heart seems strangely empty," she whispered sadly. "And I can find no joy there."

Then the King was filled with grief and everyone in that happy land was sorrowful.



Chapter 2

THE NEWS REACHES SANTA LAND

Far to the north of Cameroon lay Santa Land. And here, at the very time that everyone in Cameroon was filled with sorrow, there was nothing but laughter.

It was just three weeks before Christmas and, as usual, things were in a turmoil as all the Santa Land elves and brownies and fairies made last minute preparations for Christmas Day.

Santa Claus himself rushed from toy shop to toy shop seeing that the requests sent him by every child were fulfilled. But, oh, there was such confusion!

Once he burst into the doll shop where all the dolls were ready to be packed into his sled - but every doll was bald headed!

“Good gracious!” cried Santa to Mimi, the fairy who ran the doll shop. “Aren’t these dolls to have hair?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” retorted Mimi irritably. “But, the question is - what sort of hair? A little girl writes that she wants a doll. Well, who knows whether she wants a doll with hair black as a thundercloud, or golden like the sun, or red as an autumn apple? Should the hair be long or short, curly or straight, shingled or -”

Santa began backing away. “You must just try to guess,” he said feebly and rushed away. He burst into the book shop and there he found even greater confusion.

The bookmakers didn’t know whether a child who asked for a book wanted pictures on every page or on every other page. Then there were the wagon-makers who weren’t sure whether children liked wagons that pulled or wagons that pushed.

And so it went until Santa was so weary of the turmoil that he went to his cottage to have a cup of hot chocolate and rest a while before his fire.

But he had hardly sipped the chocolate which Mrs. Claus fixed for him when the door opened and a visitor burst into the room.

It was Hoppy the Toad who lived far away in Cameroon but who came frequently to visit with his good friend Santa.

“What sad news I have,” he said to Santa. He told him about the Princess Ruth, how her illness had brought sorrow to all the land and how she would die unless she had a three-inch smile by Christmas Day.

Then Santa and Mrs. Claus were sorrowful too, for they dearly loved Cameroon and its happy people.

“They always had such a joyous Christmas Festival,” murmured Mrs. Claus, weeping softly.

“Well, do you know,” said Hoppy the Toad. “The King still is planning to have a Festival. Only, this year, it will be for the Princess herself and everyone in the Land will bring a present.”

“Oh, cried Mrs. Claus, “then surely one present at least will be found to make her smile!”



“I should think so!” agreed Hoppy. “If only you could see some of the gifts the people are planning! Golden trinkets, dolls that actually walk by themselves, play houses with marble staircases, fluffy Teddy Bears that growl aloud!”

He paused for breath and Mrs. Claus got up and poured him a cup of chocolate. She wiped her tears away on the corner of her apron. “There is nothing to worry about,” she said smiling. “Any one of those gifts will bring joy to the Princess’ heart and she will live.”

But Santa Claus himself did not smile.

“There is only one gift in all the world that could make a truly heavy heart joyful,” he said.

“Why, what could it be?” cried Mrs. Claus.

“The Magic Music Box of Poldrex.” said Santa unhappily.

Chapter 3

LOUIS PLANS A GIFT

The saddest child in Cameroon was a little boy named Louis who worked in the King's gardens. For as long as he could remember Louis had loved the Princess Ruth and every day since he first worked in the gardens he had picked a bouquet for her and brought it to her himself.

When he heard that the Princess' heart would stop beating unless she could be made to smile he wished that he himself might die, for he could not imagine a world without the Princess there to brighten it.

"Can't something be done?" he asked the head gardener.

The gardener shook his head. He had seen the fever strike others and he knew such people always died of broken hearts. But he wanted to cheer the little boy so said, "Perhaps the Christmas Festival will bring her joy. Everyone is giving such beautiful presents it may be that one at least will save her."

Then Louis dropped the hoe with which he had been digging and sat back on his heels. "What do you suppose I might give the Princess?" he asked.

The gardener smiled. "Alas," he said, "you have not the money to buy a fine gift such as others are giving. Your present will show merely that you are thinking of her"

"But that is not enough!" cried Louis. "My present must make her live!"

"That, I am afraid, is beyond us," the gardener. "Only a miracle will make the Princess smile again."

"Then I will make a miracle," vowed Louis. "I must, I must" He got up and went away. There was an old well far back in the garden where he often went when he had a problem to think out. He had a friend who lived in the well and this friend never failed to help him.

You see, Louis believed in fairies. Now, his friend was named Mr. Meriman and he was not like other fairies. Generally speaking, a fairy is a lovely creature with gorgeous wings and a voice as beautiful as the music of a violin.

But Mr. Meriman had a voice like an angry goose and he was so ugly he had to live in a well so he wouldn't frighten people who might happen upon him.

"Come out, Mr. Meriman, please come out and talk to me," called Louis, leaning over the well.

"I'm already out," squawked a voice behind him. "I've been sitting here for hours."

Louis peered on the ground beside the well and found Mr. Meriman sitting on a pad of moss almost at his very feet. Then Louis told him about the Princess Ruth.

"Well," said Mr. Meriman, "there is only one gift in all the world which might possibly make the Princess smile."

"There is a certain music box" continued Mr. Meriman, "the only one of its kind in the world. It has little ivory figures carved on the top and when the music plays the figures get up and dance. And what music it is - it is past describing!"

"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Louis. "That is what I shall get for the Princess."

Mr. Meriman shook his head. "Alas! The Witches of Poldrex have the magic music box."

"The Witches of Poldrex!" cried Louis, and, then, indeed, his heart was heavy for he knew that these witches were evil beyond words and that any human being who went to their land never returned.

All the same, he jumped up and started away.

"Where are you going?" squeaked Mr. Meriman.

"I am going to the Witches of Poldrex," replied Louis firmly. "I am going to get the music box which will make the Princess smile again!"



Chapter 4

HOPPY THE TOAD GIVES ADVICE

When Louis told Mr. Meriman, the ugly fairy, that he was going to get the magic music box which would make the Princess smile. Mr. Meriman shook his head

“You don’t know what you are saying,” he protested. “You could never find the witches in ten thousand years And even if you did find them - remember, no man has ever seen them and lived to tell about it.”

“Then, what shall I do?” fretted Louis

Mr. Meriman sat with his arms around his knees rocking himself backwards and forwards. “True, true.” he muttered to himself. “Something must be done, for if the Princess dies there will be no Christmas in Cameroon this year and perhaps not for many years to come.”

“Think of something. Mr. Meriman” begged Louis. “Please think hard.”

“Can’t you see I’m thinking hard?” snapped the fairy. “Now be quiet for a moment.”

So they sat there beside the garden well. Louis chewing impatiently on a blade of grass and staring at the fairy while Mr. Meriman gave his agile mind the stiffest workout it had had in many, many a Monday.

Finally he stopped rocking and leaped to his feet. (Even standing he was no higher than 10 fingers!)

“There’s nothing else for it!” he cried. “You must go to Santa Land!”

“Santa Land!” cried Louis, choking on the blade of grass he had been sucking. “But, how? It would be as easy to get to Poldrex!”

Mr. Meriman paid no attention. “You must go to Santa Land and get Santa himself to help you get the music box.”

“That is all foolishness!” protested Louis. “Even supposing I go to Santa Land, do you think Santa would have time for me? It’s almost Christmas. He’d be far too busy to bother with me.”

“I know Santa Claus,” said the fairy, “and I met him once at a party two or three hundred years ago - he always has time to help when help is really needed.”

“All right, then,” said Louis, beginning to have hope for the first time. “Tell me how to get to Santa Land.”

“I don’t know myself,” admitted Mr. Merriman. “But, I have a friend. Hoppy the Toad, who very often hops up to Santa Land for a visit. Come with me and we will ask him the way.

So the two of them went off to see Hoppy the Toad who lived on a water lily in a nearby pool. When the fairy told the toad what he wanted Hoppy was quite cross.

“Go away and let me sleep!” he croaked. “A grown up boy could never get to Santa Land the way I do and it’s quite useless to bother me.”

“Listen, you ugly old thing,” said the fairy calmly. “You better start talking right now or I’ll never let you swim in my well again.”

“Who is calling who ‘ugly?’” cried Hoppy indignantly. “Your face is so plain you have to live in a dark well so you won’t frighten yourself!”

“But I have wings,” replied Mr. Meriman serenely.

“If you call that broken down lace on your back “wings” then I’m a brownie!”

“Perhaps you are.” agreed Mr. Meriman. “Now let us stop this gossiping. Tell the boy how to get to Santa Land.”

“Oh, very well,” said Hoppy, who had intended to tell all along but always enjoyed a little heated argument first. “Unbutton your ears, boy, and listen carefully because I don’t intend to repeat a single word.”

So while Louis listened eagerly, Hoppy told him the way to Santa Land.



Chapter 5

THE START FOR SANTA LAND

As soon as Hoppy had finished giving Louis the directions for the journey to Santa Land, the Toad fell into a deep sleep and the boy and Mr. Meriman hurried away.

“You had best be off at once,” said the ugly fairy. “There’s no telling how long it will take and it is just a leap and a jump until Christmas.”

“Yes,” agreed Louis. “But first I will go to see the Princess and tell her of my plans.”

So he thanked the fairy who had been such a good friend and ran into the palace to find the Princess Ruth. It was afternoon and the little girl was sitting in her room staring out of the window. How unhappy she looked! She turned when Louis entered the room, but though her eyes showed she was glad to see him, her mouth did not smile.

He sat beside her on the window seat and held her hand “Listen carefully now,” he said. “I have heard of a magic music box which plays such music that no one on earth could hear it and not laugh with joy. I am going to get it for you!”

“Oh, Louis” she cried. “How wonderful it would be to laugh again. Where is it? When will you get it?”

Then he told her how the Witches of Poldrex had the box and how he was going to Santa Land to ask Santa himself to help him get it.

The little girl jumped up from the window seat and squeezed Louis’ hand. “Let me go with you!” she cried. “Please Louis. Oh, I want so much to see Santa! It would make me happy, Louis - even if I didn’t smile! Please, please, Louis!”

The boy looked at her doubtfully. “There’s no telling what might happen,” he objected. “The way is long and there are dangers.”

“I don’t care! I’ll be with you!” She was so afraid Louis would refuse.

All the time she was talking, the Princess was running around the room, pulling on her winter coat and her red mittens and getting a clean handkerchief. She wrote a note to her father explaining where she was going.

Finally she stood before Louis again and when he saw how terribly she wanted to go he gave in.

“Very well,” he said. “Go and wait for me by the well at the back of the garden. There is something I have to get.”

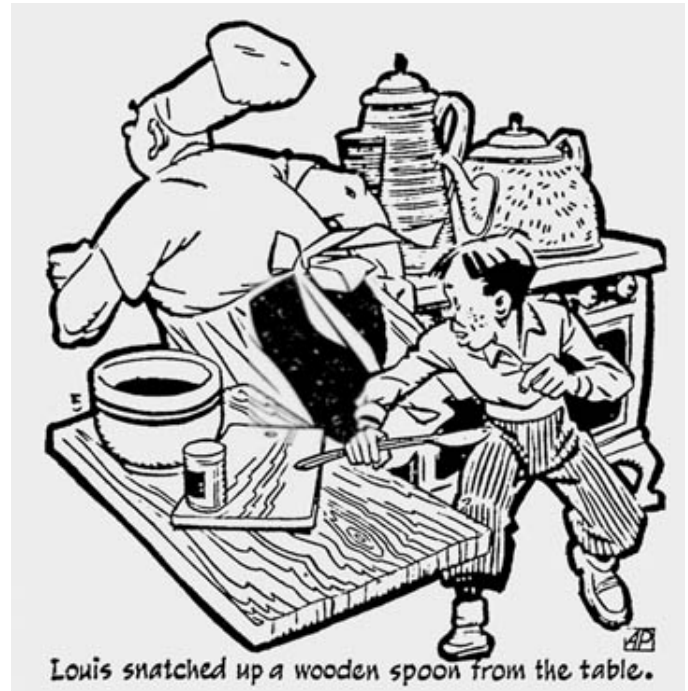
So the Princess ran out of the Palace and Louis went down into the kitchen

“Oreo.” said Louis. “Could I have a cookie?”

“Cookies, cookies, cookies,” grumbled Oreo. “That’s all I ever hear from you!”

“Please,” said Louis. “With raisins in it.”

“Raisins in it!” cried Oreo. “Not a plain cookie but a raisin cookie! What kind of a beggar is this!”



But all the same, he went off to the pantry for the cookie. While he was gone Louis snatched up a wooden spoon from the table and put it into his pocket. When Oreo returned with the raisin cookie he thanked him and tucked the cookie in beside the spoon.

Then he went out the kitchen door, circled the palace, and ran into the garden. He found the Princess.

“Come now,” he said. He took her hand and led her to the end of the garden. They climbed the wall and jumped to the ground on the other side. There they found six great trees in a row. Louis counted off until he came to the fourth. He knocked on the bark with his fist and almost instantly a little old gnome shimmied down out of the branches.

The Princess was ready to flee in terror but the little gnome said quite pleasantly, “Do you have a raisin cookie?”

Chapter 6

A TRIP IN A TREE

It was the strangest thing to see the little old gnome with a red nose and pointed ears fall out of the tree and ask for a raisin cookie!

If the Princess had been able to, she would certainly have laughed. Louis himself couldn't help smiling, though he had been told by Hoppy the Toad just what to expect.

"Yes," he said to the gnome. "I have a raisin cookie." And he pulled out of his pocket the cookie he had begged from Oreo the cook. The little gnome snatched at it but Louis pulled it back just in time.

"First," he said, "you must help us on our journey to Santa Land."

"My gracious!" cried the gnome, "Santa has no time for visitors now! It's almost Christmas!"

"But we must go," insisted Louis. And he told the gnome about the Princess and how she would die unless she had a three-inch smile by Christmas.

The gnome clucked his tongue sympathetically. "My, what a terrible thing," he said. "Perhaps if I told some jokes it would make the little girl smile."

"I know some very good jokes," continued the gnome, who sometimes grew very lonely and loved to talk with anyone who came his way.

"Please," broke in Louis. "We are in a terrible hurry!"

"Oh very well," said the gnome. "Give me the cookie and I will start you on your way."

So Louis gave him the cookie and the gnome gobbled it up in one big bite. Then he turned to the tree and began peeling off strips of bark. Under each strip there was a big red button.



Carefully, the gnome unfastened each button and, to the children's astonishment, the tree opened up!

The tree was hollow and on the inside there was a little bench.

"Sit there," ordered the gnome. Louis and the Princess squeezed together on the bench.

"Good-bye, now," said the gnome. "Give my regards to Santa when you get there and tell him not to forget my red scarf for Christmas!"

With that he buttoned up the tree and Ruth and Louis were left on the inside in the dark. Before they could call out, the bench began slowly to descend.

"It's all right," Louis reassured Ruth, who was clinging to him in fright. "We won't be hurt."

But at the same time he couldn't help being just a little frightened himself.

"I'm not afraid," exclaimed Ruth, although her teeth were chattering wildly.

The two children clung together while the bench made its mysterious journey through the dark. First they could feel themselves going down, then sideways, around the curves, backward and then, up, up, up - until they thought surely they must have reached the sky.

Finally after a long, long while, the bench came to a stop.

They hadn't long to wait for suddenly they heard a noise and slowly they began to see light. They got up and rushed out of the dark.

"Why!" exclaimed Ruth. "We're in the tree again!"

And there, sure enough, was an unbuttoned tree with their bench inside.

"But it's not the same tree!" cried Louis. "See, this is not like any tree that grows in Cameroon."

"And it's much colder," said Ruth.

"Of course," said Louis. "That's because we're getting nearer Santa Land. Let's see now - Hoppy the Toad said there would be someone here selling baskets."

No sooner had he spoken than a strange voice cried out, "I don't sell baskets, I trade them for wooden spoons!"

Chapter 7

A RIDE IN A BASKET

A round faced woman came up to Louis and the Princess and waved a basket under their noses.

"If you have a wooden spoon you can have my basket," she said.

"What kind of a basket is it?" asked Louis.

"Will it help us get to Santa Land" asked Ruth.

"The only way you can get to Santa Land is in my basket," chuckled the woman. "Here, see!" And she pointed beyond the trees to where a great ocean lay. The children gasped. Never had they dreamed there was so much water in all the world.

"Now, how could you cross such an ocean without my basket?" asked the woman.

"But," protested Ruth. "That basket has holes - it would leak!"

"Leak!" cried the woman. "Listen to the child! This basket won't come near the water. It flies!"

"Oh," exclaimed Ruth. "Oh, Louis! If only we had a wooden spoon!"

"I have a wooden spoon." said Louis and he pulled out of his pocket the spoon which Hoppy the Toad had told him to take.

The woman snatched it from his hands. "My," she chortled, hugging the spoon close. "How I love wooden spoons! You see. I have 365 children and I must make a birthday cake every single day of the year. I have worn out several hundred wooden spoons in the past few years! Here's your basket. Hop into it and order it to go wherever you wish."

Louis and Ruth piled into the basket "To Santa Land!" they cried together.

Instantly the basket rose from the ground and, rocking gently back and forth, circled once above the round faced woman and then moved towards the ocean.

Higher and higher they sailed - right into the clouds.

In mid-afternoon they saw land below. The great ocean had been left behind. They leaned far over the edge of the basket and couldn't believe what they saw. There was a great mountain of toys below!

"Oh, let us see what strange place this is!" cried Ruth. Louis ordered the basket to descend. Slowly they came to earth, right at the foot of the remarkable mountain. There was an old silver-haired man sitting on a bench playing on a child's flute.

"What strange land is this?" asked Ruth, her eyes wide in wonder.

"This," answered the man, "is the Island of Lost Toys. Have you ever lost a toy, child?"

"Why, yes." replied Ruth, "I once lost a red and yellow rubber ball. But it was long ago when I was only five years old."

"All the same," said the old man. "if you had time you would find it here. Every toy that is ever lost is brought to this island



by the Play Brownies." He pointed at the mountain of toys. "I guess there are a hundred thousand rubber balls there!"

Louis climbed among the toys. "Only just look!" he cried. "Here are dolls and wagons and rubber balls and spinning tops and kites and - everything!"

"But what will happen to all these things?" asked Ruth.

"Once in every 500 years," explained the old man, "the Play Brownies load a ship with toys and take it all over the world hiding the toys in strange places for children to find unexpectedly."

The old man smiled. "That is why boys sometimes find marbles back of the kitchen stove or a jackknife under the living room rug." Then he pointed at the mountain. "If you like you may stay and play as much as you wish. I get lonely sometimes."

"Thank you," replied Louis looking longingly at the toys. "But we have a long journey to make." And reluctantly he and Ruth climbed back into the basket.

"Goodby." they cried. "If ever we lose another toy we shall know where to find it!"

And away they sailed in the magic basket.

Chapter 8

ARRIVAL IN SANTA LAND

The island of Lost Toys was only the first of the strange lands which Louis and the Princess Ruth visited in their sailing basket. There were lands no geography book had ever imagined.

Soon after leaving the island the basket came down in a land where ice cream grew on trees! Just think - Louis and Ruth were able to reach up and pick vanilla cones and peppermint and butter crunch and chocolate cones - right off the trees! They ate and ate until they were so full they could hardly squeeze into the basket.

"Oh," cried Ruth. "If only I could smile, how wonderful all of this would be!"

The next place they visited was a City of Pigs where there was not a single human being. There were only pigs and they lived in houses and went to schools just as you and I. They had a public library for pigs who liked to read and there was a playground for the baby pigs. They had pig policemen who saw to it that law and order were kept in the city. The lady pigs went to tea parties and held sewing circles and sometimes the men pigs played cards together or went bowling.

It was a most extraordinary city. But Louis couldn't help laughing because he said that though the pigs acted just like human beings. He bet there was one thing that he did which they would never do and that was eat roast pork!

Then they came to a town where all the houses were made out of paper. And the streets were paved with paper and the furniture in the houses was made of paper and the dinner plates and most of the clothes and all of the children's toys were made of paper.

Louis and Ruth asked a man in the street why this should be so and the man told them there was a paper mill in the town and long, long ago a screw on the rollers which turned out the paper had come loose so that tons and tons of paper poured out over the city and nobody could stop it,

Finally, just when everyone was about to drown in paper, someone got the idea of using it to build houses and make furniture and clothes. So ever since then the townspeople had been kept busy using up all the paper the broken mill turned out.

Louis laughed - and Ruth wished hard that she could, too. But she couldn't. Then they went on their way. They came to the Island of Toy Horses where no horse was larger than a small dog. A boy might hitch such a horse to his wagon and ride anywhere he chose.

Then there was the land of walking Teddy Bears where little cuddly bears made of softest wool romped about like real live animals. The little Princess hugged one of the bears in her arms and begged Louis to let her take it with them. But he showed her there wouldn't be room in the basket for them and the bear, too. So she let the soft loveable creature go.

Finally, at the end of the day, as they soared along in their basket, Louis became a little impatient.

"Soon we will be there. I can hardly wait to start out on the search for the magic music box," he said.

Ruth reached out and caught his hand. "Do you really think the music box will make me smile again?" she cried.

"I am sure of it!" Louis reassured her. "Anyway wait and see what Santa says." Suddenly he leaned over the basket edge. "Look! Look!" he cried. "We are landing. This must be Santa Land. See! There are reindeer running in the snow!"

True enough, the basket was coming to earth - an earth covered with snow and dotted with workshops whose chimneys were smoking like old men's pipes.



Chapter 9

A TALK WITH SANTA

As soon as the basket landed in Santa Land, Louis and the little Princess tumbled out. The snow was so deep it came up to their knees and they had to hang on to one another to walk.

Nearby was a closed-in field where eight reindeer were kicking up their heels and making the snow fly in all directions. Beyond the field was row on row of workshops and beyond these was a tiny red cottage almost buried under centuries of snow.

“That must be Santa’s home,” guessed Louis, holding tight to Ruth’s hand as they pushed through the drifts.

Now that they were truly in Santa Land, Ruth was bubbling over with questions.

“Is it true, I wonder, that Santa always wears red?” she asked and then, before Louis could even try to answer, she rushed on with other questions: “Is Mrs. Claus fat and jolly like Santa? How do they manage to keep warm in this cold place? Does Santa have a Christmas tree on Christmas Day, too?”

The questions popped from the little girl. Fortunately she had not long to wait for all the answers, because in a little while the children found themselves standing at the very door of the cottage. Suddenly they were too shy to knock and while they stood there trying to get up the courage the door swung open!

“Come in, children! Come in!” boomed a great voice. “I’ve been waiting for you!”

And there was Santa Claus himself (actually dressed all in red) pulling the astonished children into the warm and cozy cottage. Mrs. Claus was there, too, and it didn’t take but a second for the children to see that she was every bit as fat and jolly as Santa. Without a word she began pulling off the little Princess’ coat and her wet shoes and stockings.

Then she fussed. “Gracious me, gracious me! You’re soaking wet - clear through! Come now and warm yourself by the fire. You, too, boy - be quick, now!”

And in the space of two deep breaths she had the children wrapped in blankets and sitting on two little footstools before the fire.

“Well, then,” said Santa, standing before them and puffing on a pipe. “So this is the little girl who cannot smile!”

Oh, sir! How did you know?” cried the Princess in amazement.

Santa laughed and laughed. “I guess I know everything about all the boys and girls in the world,” he said. “If I didn’t how would I know what to bring them for Christmas?”

Santa turned very solemn. “I have been told,” he said, “that the heart is already dead that does not swell with gladness when the music box is played. Yes, I think it would make the Princess smile.”

“It must be a three-inch smile,” put in Ruth.

“Yes.” nodded Santa, laughing again. “A three-inch smile.”

“Then,” declared Louis. “I must be off after the box at once!”

Santa shook his head. “The Witches of Poldrex will not give up the box easily,” he said. “We must think out a plan first.”

Just then Mrs. Claus came out of the kitchen with a platter of butterscotch buns in one hand and a pitcher of milk in the other. “Nothing has to be planned,” she said firmly, “until these children are fed.”

Louis and Ruth willingly fell upon the delicious buns. When the meal was over, Mrs. Claus insisted on putting the Princess to bed while Santa and Louis sat on before the fire.

After a while, Santa said, “You’ll need a pair of shoes.”

Louis looked at his shoes in surprise. “But - my shoes are all right,” he protested.

“And you’ll need rope,” went on Santa. “And a net.”

“But - I don’t see -” began Louis.

“Come,” interrupted Santa. “We’ll go out to the shops and fix you up.”

And Santa rushed out into the snow leaving Louis to put on his coat and follow, wondering all the time what on earth shoes and rope and a net had to do with the Witches of Poldrex.



After a while, Santa said, “You’ll need a pair of shoes.”

Chapter 10

LOUIS STARTS FOR POLDREX

First Santa Claus took Louis to the clothes shop where all the new sweaters, suits, hats, gloves and underwear are made to go under Christmas trees all over the world.

What a busy shop it was! For, although children themselves do not often ask Santa to bring them clothes, their mothers almost always add an extra postscript to the children's Christmas letters.

The head of the clothes shop was Patrick Tweedleknees, the oldest dwarf in Santa Land. When Santa came in with Louis, old Patrick paid no attention to them, he was so busy sewing sleeves on little blue dresses, size four.

"Patrick," said Santa, "I want you to fix this boy a special pair of shoes."

Tweedleknees snorted. "What can you be thinking of? Christmas is 10 days off! Let him wait and get his shoes under the Christmas tree as others do."

"He must have them at once," insisted Santa, smiling at Louis who was quite frightened by Patrick's gruffness. "And they must be able to go 2,000 miles at a single step!"

Patrick dropped all his pins and needles and his scissors, too. He threw up his hands in disgust.

"How can I do such a thing when I'm working 28 hours a day now?"

But Santa hurries Louis away before Patrick could catch his breath. When they got beyond the shop they heard Patrick shrieking after them.

"Well, what size does the boy wear?" the dwarf screamed.

Santa laughed and laughed while Louis ran back to have his foot measured.

"You mustn't mind Patrick," said Santa to Louis when they had finally left the shop. "He doesn't mean half of his gruffness."

Then he took Louis to the doll shop where Mimi the fairy had charge of making all the dolls that would fill Santa's sled on Christmas Eve.

"What a nice boy!" teased Mimi, looking at Louis. "Did you want to see me about a doll for Christmas?"

Louis blushed - as any boy would. But Santa slapped his back and said. "Mimi likes to tease." Then he told the fairy he wanted her to make him a rope out of doll's hair. "An elastic rope," he explained, "That will be as long or as short as a boy might ever wish." Mimi promised to have the rope ready in one hour.

Then Santa took Louis to the sport shop. Here were tennis rackets' and hunting guns and footballs and fishing rods and baseball bats and all such things that a boy loved to find around his Christmas tree. Louis' eyes bulged with curiosity as he looked about. When Santa made his request, Moppet, the Sports chief, was quite eager to comply.

"Just what kind of a net it that you want?" he asked.

"The finest net you can make," said Santa. "So that nothing can get through it - not even an ant!"

After a while Patrick Tweedleknees and Mimi and Moppet came to Santa's cottage Patrick gave Louis a pair of thick leather moccasins and rushed away in a bad temper because he'd had to waste so much time. Mimi gave the boy a thin hair rope. It was just 10 inches long but it stretched as far as Louis could spread it between his outstretched arms. Finally, Moppet gave him a net which was so finely woven you couldn't even see through it.

Mrs. Claus packed the boy a lunch of peanut butter and raisin sandwiches. "The little Princess is feverish," she told Louis. "It is best that you go without seeing her again."

So Louis thanked Santa and Mrs. Claus. Then he put on the leather moccasins and took the first 2,000-mile step towards the Witches of Poldrex.



Chapter 11

LOUIS SEES THE MUSIC BOX

It was 140,000 miles from Santa Land to Poldrex but Louis made the journey in exactly two hours and thirty-four minutes. He had only to take one step in his wonderful moccasins and 2,000 miles would be covered!

He walked over mountains, stepped across oceans, tiptoed through tropical jungles, leaped over deserts, and before he'd had time to get tired he found himself in a strange barren field. No live thing grew there, even the trees in nearby woods were as bare and ugly as any old sticks stuck in the ground. There was no sign of a human as far as he could see.

Louis knew he was at last in the land of the Witches of Poldrex. Looking about him he saw a hole in the ground no larger than the top of a barrel and above it a sign which said: "Stay Out." Louis climbed into the hole. It was really a tunnel and just wide enough for the boy to scrape along on his stomach. Never had he imagined such blackness!

It seemed to him he surely must have been crawling for weeks when suddenly there was an end of the darkness. A strange bluish light flickered ahead of him and he saw that it came from an enormous room at the end of the tunnel.

Carefully he pushed himself to the doorway and peeped in. He could hardly believe what he saw!

There were three beautiful ladies sitting before a great mirror admiring themselves. They had golden hair that curled around their waists and lovely white skin that gleamed in the bluish light.

Louis gasped with astonishment. "Surely," he thought, "these cannot be the evil Witches of Poldrex!"

He had been expecting to see such awful creatures! Here, instead were ladies combing their hair and perfuming their ears exactly as he had seen ladies of the court do back in Cameroon.

But these three ladies did not seem happy. And their faces, though pretty to look at, showed their discontent.

Finally, as Louis looked on, one of the ladies stood up and stretched her arms. "Sisters, I am bored," she said listlessly. "What shall we do?"

Her voice was not pretty. It was harsh and scratchy.

"Let us have some music," said her sisters.

Then the sisters went to a chest in the corner of the room and pulled out a small ivory box. Louis leaned out of his hiding place, his eyes popping with excitement. This, he knew, must be the magic music box which would save the Princess Ruth.

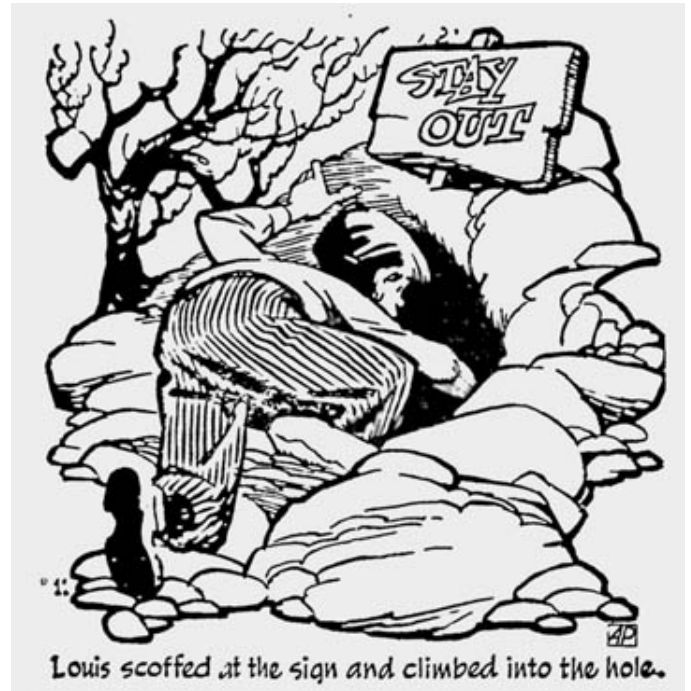
While he watched, they laid the box on a table and opened the lid. Instantly, the haunting music began - music such as no mind has ever been able to imagine! It filled the heart with gladness and drove away all sorrow.

While the magic strains filled the room four little figures which were carved on the lid of the box slowly climbed down and began to dance - oh, so gracefully, so buoyantly, as though they were leaves flying before a wind.

Louis was almost too enchanted to breathe. Then he noticed a strange thing.

The witches were hardly listening to the music! It did not fill their hearts with delight. For them it was just a noise to fill the silence of the room. Then Louis was happier than ever. Because, he thought, if they do not care for the music they will not mind parting with the box.

With that, Louis could stand the suspense no longer. "I must have it! I must!" He cried and he sprang from his hiding place and faced the astonished witches.



Chapter 12

THE WITCHES TEST LOUIS

When Louis burst into the witches' den as the three sisters were listening to the music box it would have been hard to picture three more amazed creatures. Never before had any outsider been to Poldrex and the witches could only sit and stare to see a small boy standing in their private den.

After a moment one of the sisters got up and shut the lid of the music box.

"Who are you?" rasped her sisters, rushing up and clutching Louis' shoulders. "How dare you come here?"

"Please, please," begged Louis in a quavering voice, for indeed he was frightened nearly out of his wits. Now that the music had stopped the room seemed terribly cold. And although the witches were even more beautiful close up than they had looked from the hiding place Louis was quite timid in their presence.

"I merely came to get the music box to save a little girl's life."

"Indeed?" snapped a witch. "And what will you pay for it?"

"Anything" cried Louis eagerly. "I will do anything you wish - only tell me what you want!"

"Enough of this talk," cried a witch. "The question is what shall we do with this boy who has dared to come to our land."

"Let us cast a spell over him and change him into a mushroom!" suggested one.

"Let us put him in a golden cage and teach him to chirp like a bird," said another.

Louis' legs were trembling so he could scarcely stand. But still they were such beautiful creatures he couldn't quite believe they would really want to hurt him.

So he said, "Please, won't you find it in your hearts to help a little girl who is very sick?"

When he said this it was as if he himself had cast a spell over the witches.

Finally one of them sighed and said. "We have no hearts!"

Then the three sisters told him to listen for their heart beats. So he put his ear against each sister's breast and, indeed, he could not hear even a very faint beat.

"Is that why you are witches?" he asked.

They nodded. "We do terrible things even when we don't want to do them," explained one. "Because we have no hearts to feel with."

Louis edged over to the table on which was the magic music box, "I would like so much to have it," he murmured wistfully.

The witches shook their heads.

"But," insisted Louis. "The box means nothing to you. It can't fill your hearts with joy."



One of the sisters sighed and said, "We have no hearts."

"Nevertheless," explained one sister. "The Witches of Poldrex can never do anything kind."

For a while there was a gloomy silence. Then one of the witches jumped to her feet and exclaimed. "We can't give you the box but you say you will do anything for it. Let us, then, throw it into the bottomless pit. If you jump in after it you may have it."

"What sport!" cried her sisters gleefully. "Let us do it at once!"

They all ran into the next room where there was no furniture at all. In the very center of the room there was a great pit - so deep that when one witch shrieked into it, it was 20 minutes before the echo returned!

"Now," said one witch. "If you get the box it is yours."

"That is fair enough," agreed the others, for they knew there was only one way of getting to the bottom of the pit and that was by jumping in - and who could do that?

But Louis remembered the rope made of doll's hair which Mimi the fairy had made for him.

"It is a magic rope," Santa had told him. "It will be as long or as short as ever you want it."

So Louis said, "Go ahead. I am not afraid."

Then the witches leaned over the pit and dropped in the box.

In an instant Louis had tied one end of his rope around the leg of one of the astonished witches. The other end he threw over the side of the pit and immediately slid down into the darkness!

Chapter 13

LOUIS IN THE PIT

The three witches were too astonished to speak when Louis began climbing down his endless rope into the bottomless pit. The boy had tied one end of the rope around one of the sister's legs. Now she tried frantically to untie it but it was a magic rope and no one could untie it but Louis.

She was afraid to move for she knew that she might be pulled into the pit if she lost her balance.

Of course the pit really did have a bottom but it was deeper than any other hole in the world. All the same, it was no time at all before Louis had gone all the way to the bottom.

It was as black as an ocean at midnight and Louis dared not think what he might land in. But to his surprise the floor was as soft and cushiony as his own bed at home. And best of all, there was such a wonderful fragrance all around him! He leaned over and felt on the floor and found that it was three feet deep with rose petals!

"How wonderful!" he cried. "The music box could not have been broken when it landed on these!"

He scrambled around in the dark until his hands closed around the precious box. He placed it inside his shirt and then began the hard climb back. After a hard struggle he made it all the way to the top of the pit.

Carefully he untied the rope from the witch's leg. Then he said, "You promised me I could have it if I went in the pit for it. So now it is mine?"

The three witches looked more unhappy than ever.

"It is too bad," one of them finally said.

"Yes," agreed her sisters. "He seems like a nice boy, too. It is a very sad thing, sometimes, to be a witch."

"What are you talking about?" cried Louis angrily. "I did what you told me and now the box is mine!"

"But didn't you know," asked a witch unhappily, "that the Witches of Poldrex cannot keep their word?"

"That is the way we are because we have no hearts, you see," they all said at once and they looked as if they might cry any minute.

But Louis was very angry. "I don't care!" he shouted. "It no longer makes any difference to me at all about your hearts. I have the box and I am going to keep it!"

And with that he walked into the other room and climbed into the tunnel which led to the outside world.

The witches looked after him. For a moment they all thought what they should do now.

"Well," suggested one. "Perhaps we might turn loose the waquitos in the tunnel. They will make the boy give up the music box and then we will let him go."

"Good! Good!" cried her sisters and they rushed after the box of waquitos. A waquito, as you know, is an insect, half wasp and half mosquito, and its bite is very annoying. The witches had a large chest of waquitos and they dragged it now to the mouth of the tunnel.

"It is the kindest thing we can do," said the witches. "The waquitos will hurt him only enough to make him give up the box."

And with that they opened the chest. The insects had no way to fly except up the tunnel after Louis. Such a hissing they made - they could be heard for 14 miles!

"Take care now!" screamed the witches after Louis. "Give up the box and we will call off the waquitos."



Chapter 14

LOUIS AND THE WAQUITOES

When Louis heard the waquitoes hissing through the tunnel he trembled with fear. It was so narrow in the dark passage that he had all he could do to shove along on his stomach, holding tight to the magic music box with one hand.

“They shan’t get me! They shan’t!” swore the boy. But even as he made his oath he could tell by the fury of the hissing that the insects were almost upon him.

He knew that the bite of the insects would not really hurt him but would cause him to itch so that he would have to give up the music box. Only then would the witches call off the insects.

“What a terrible thing it is to have no heart!” he thought. “The witches don’t want the box and they don’t want to hurt me but because they have no hearts they don’t know how to be kind!”

He thought that Santa would certainly be able to do something about the witches’ hearts if he put his mind to it.

It wasn’t until he thought of Santa Claus that Louis remembered the fine net which Santa had the Moppet make for him. “Make it so fine that nothing can get through it - not even an ant!” Santa had ordered Moppet.

How wise Santa had been! Frantically Louis covered himself with it, stretching it over his head and shoulders and down over his feet.

Hardly had he finished when the hissing of the waquitoes became a roaring and Louis suddenly felt the insects coming to rest on his body. They smacked against his head and shoulders and legs. There were so many of them that they soon covered him the way flies cover a bowl of honey in the summertime.

But, not one was able to bite through the net!

Filled with joy, Louis inched himself along being ever so careful not to loosen the net. It was hours before he finally saw light and a few minutes later he was out in the desolate field above the witches’ den.

The waquitoes were insects of the underground and couldn’t stand the fresh air. Soon every one had perished,

Meanwhile, the three sisters at the other end of the tunnel waited and waited.

“What can have happened?” cried one. “You don’t suppose they really hurt him too badly, do you?”

“What a pity that would be,” sighed her sister. “But, he is a hardy lad - they can’t have truly harmed him.”

“Still,” exclaimed the third. It is strange we have heard no sound, I was sure he would have returned with the box long ago.”

So they waited and waited and finally they decided to go into the tunnel to see what had happened. They were not afraid for they had trained the waquitoes not to sting them.

“Before we go we had better take with us our saucepans” suggested one witch. And the three evil creatures snatched three saucepans from the cupboard. Then, after inspecting themselves in the mirror, they wrapped their gowns tight around themselves.

In a twinkling they had slithered through the passage and popped up on the other side.

They were just in time to see Louis take his first giant-size step across the field. The witches were stunned to see shoes that would move 2,000 miles in a single step.. They were even more astonished that the boy could have escaped the angry waquitoes.

“We can’t let him get away,” cried one sister. “Think of our reputation!”

“Of course!” agreed her sisters. “People will say the Witches of Poldrex have lost all their evil power!”

So each of the three sisters climbed into a saucepan and each saucepan rose instantly into the air and flew off after Louis.



They were just in time to see Louis take his first giant step.

Chapter 15

THE CHASE

What a crazy sight that was! Louis clutching the music box in his hands, and taking 2,000-mile steps, while the three witches pursued him—each flying in a saucepan with legs dangling over the sides.

On and on strode Louis, stepping over mountains and lakes and whole cities. Now and then he looked back over his shoulder, hoping each time that the witches would have given up the chase.

But alas, the witches had no intention of turning back. In fact, they were gaining!

After a while it began to rain and poor Louis had a bad time of slushing through the mud. He had lost one of his precious shoes and could only go half as fast now. One foot would step 2,000 miles but the other foot would take only an ordinary step. And he was so weary.

Up in the sky, where the witches were flying, it was hailing. The three saucepans were filled again and again with hail stones as large as goose eggs.

The witches picked out the stones and hurled them down on Louis, bruising his shoulders and face and head. The boy was so filled with terror and disappointment that he really began to cry.

“I just can’t go any further,” he thought and he wondered what would happen to the Princess Ruth.

“Maybe Santa will be able to do something” he murmured but then he remembered that Santa was counting on him. “He gave me the magic shoes and the rope and net and still I failed!”

He was crying so now that he could hardly see. For a long while he didn’t quite know where he was and then he saw that he was crossing a wide marsh and beyond the marsh lay a sea and beyond that was Santa Land.

“Oh, I shall make it! I shall!” he thought happily.

And it was just at that moment that the awful thing happened. He stepped deep in the marsh and the other magic shoe was sucked off his foot!

Now he was helpless. He could run no faster than any other boy and the evil witches in their sauce pans could move faster than the wind.

The boy looked longingly across the ocean towards Santa Land. The witches were circling above him, screeching with joy.

“If only there were some way to let Santa know!” groaned Louis aloud.

The very next instant he had found a way to get a message to Santa Land,

“What is it you want Santa to know?” inquired a sleepy voice.

Louis looked down and saw a big turtle by his feet. The creature stretched and yawned - he had been asleep for almost

17 years! Quickly Louis told him about the music box and how he had lost his shoes and the witches were about to catch him.

“I will tell Santa,” said the turtle.

“You!” cried Louis in surprise for he knew that the turtle was the slowest creature on earth. “You could never get there in time!”

“Watch me!” replied the turtle.

And with that, the old turtle waddled down to the side of the ocean. Slowly he pulled the heavy shell off his back and laid it upside down in the water. Then he climbed into the shell and, using his handkerchief to catch the wind, started sailing briskly across the sea!



Chapter 16

SANTA TO THE RESCUE

Santa and Mrs. Claus were sitting in their little kitchen while all the Santa Land workers stood in the cottage yard talking in low voices.

The Princess Ruth was very ill and everyone knew that she would die very soon unless she smiled. The little workers were so disturbed they could do no work.-. even though Christmas was almost upon them.

"It would be different," mumbled one long-eared dwarf, "if all that were needed was a small smile. I could wiggle my ears and that almost always makes folk laugh. It would give the Princess a quarter-inch smile. I am sure - but a three-inch smile, never!"

"Of course not!" whispered a pretty fairy with blue and gold wings. "Santa has said that nothing will save her but the Magic Music Box."

The brownies and elves and fairies shook their heads in silence. For a long while there was no more talking as they huddled together outside Santa's cottage waiting and hoping for sight of the boy returning with the box.

Finally, one shouted, "Here he comes! Here he comes!"

At the shout everyone turned and Santa himself ran out from the cottage and stood peering across the snow covered fields.

But right away they saw it wasn't Louis but only an old turtle waddling towards them. A wail of disappointment went up. Only Santa did not turn away. He went up to meet the turtle.

"My old friend," he greeted him. "It's been many, many years since you have been to Santa Land."

"Yes," grunted the turtle, nearly overcome with weariness. "And I would not have made the long voyage this time had it not been for a message a boy asked me to bring you."

Then all gathered around while the turtle told Santa how Louis had lost both his magic shoes and how the witches captured him in the marsh just as the turtle set sail in his shell.

"I would have brought the music box myself," he finished, "but there was not room enough for it and me in my shell."

Now indeed, all the Santa Land folk were heavy hearted. But before any could speak there was a sound on the porch behind them. Turning, they saw the Princess Ruth standing there, the tears streaming down her face.

She ran and threw her arms around Santa. "Oh, please." she sobbed. "Can't you save Louis?"

Santa patted the little girl's shoulder. "We will try," he promised.

Santa turned to the workers. "I am going after the boy," he said. "Anyone who wants to go can climb into the sleigh."

Within two seconds every worker in Santa Land was running towards the red sleigh.

Then, slowly, the sleigh rose into the sky and started off across the great sea.



Meanwhile, Louis had been captured by the three witches. They tied his feet and hands to the marsh grass so that he couldn't run away.

"Why don't you let me go?" begged Louis for the last time. "What does it matter to you?"

"We are witches," the sisters reminded him unhappily. "If you had no heart you would understand why we have to be evil even when we don't want to be."

Just at that moment there was a roaring of wind in the northern sky and, looking up, Louis and the three sisters saw Santa and all his workers riding down out of the sky.

THE SMOKE SCREEN

When Louis saw Santa coming down out of the sky his heart swelled with joy.

“Hurray! Hurray!” he cried and wanted to run around waving his arms in greeting. But of course he couldn’t because his feet and hands were tied to the marsh grass.

The three sisters stood staring up at the sleigh, too astounded to move. “What is it,” one finally asked. “I have never seen such a business.”

“It is Santa!” cried Louis. “Santa and all his Santa Land workers. They will make an end of you very quickly!”

“End us!” cried the witches. “He cannot hurt us!”

“We will have to destroy him.” explained one. “And that is very sad.”

“Always you talk so foolish!” cried Louis angrily. “Why do you have to do things you don’t want to do?”

“Because we have no hearts,” they explained patiently.

“And now,” said the oldest sister. “Let us quickly decide what we are to do so that we can get it done with the least fuss.”

“I brought our pipes with us,” suggested one. “We might set up a smoke cloud so that Santa and his friends would be able to see nothing at all and soon would perish”

“Splendid! Splendid!” agreed her sisters.

Just then the great red sleigh pulled by eight reindeer came to rest on the marsh. Brownies and elves and fairies began scrambling over the sides.

But Santa cried, “Wait” He alone had seen what the witches were up to. The evil creatures were running around and around the sleigh while they puffed furiously on their pipes. In a very

few minutes Santa and his workers were surrounded by a seven-foot wall of dense smoke.

“What shall we do? What will happen to us?” cried a timid fairy. But no one could answer. The smoke was making their eyes burn so that it seemed as though everyone were crying his head off.

When the witches had finished their smoking they went over and sat down by their saucepans. “It will be some time now before they are overcome by the smoke,” said the eldest sister. “Let us nap until it is over.”

So the three of them stretched out on the marsh grass and soon were fast asleep.

Meanwhile the poor Santa Land workers coughed and cried in the evil smelling smoke. Only one fellow didn’t seem to mind. He was an elf named Tomkin who was a new worker in Santa Land. When it seemed that they would all be overcome Tomkin climbed up near Santa in the sleigh and cleared his throat.

“What is it, Tomkin?” asked Santa whose face was black with soot.

“Santa,” said Tomkin shyly, “Before I came to Santa Land I worked in a circus. I can get rid of this smoke, I think.”

“How could you do it?” asked Santa.

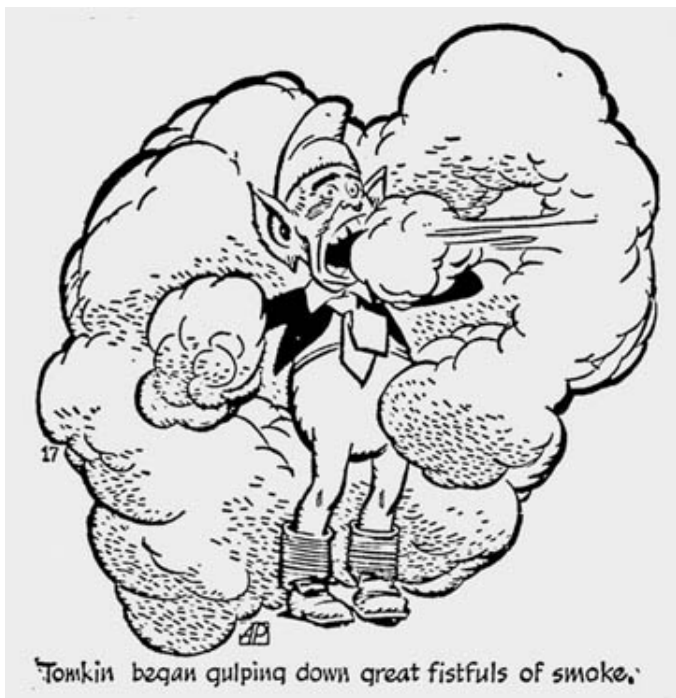
“Well,” said Tomkin. “In the circus I was a smoke-eater!”

Santa threw back his head and roared with laughter. “Hurry, Tomkin,” he cried. “Eat all you can hold!”

So Tomkin jumped from the sleigh and began gulping down great fistfuls of smoke. The workers looked on and cheered with relief and all vowed that Tomkin would never have to work again as long as he lived. It just wasn’t any time at all before the little fellow had eaten every speck of smoke.

Then Santa and the Santa Land folk jumped from the sleigh and rushed across the marsh towards the sleeping witches.

Suddenly a voice called out, “Wait, wait, don’t forget me!” And there was Louis trying to struggle free of the marsh grass.



Tomkin began gulping down great fistfuls of smoke.

Chapter 18

SANTA AND THE WITCHES

First the Santa Land folk untied Louis and set him free.

“Do you have the box?” Santa asked him. When Louis showed him how he had it hidden inside his shirt Santa patted his back.

“Good boy.” he said simply and Louis blushed with pride.

Then the brownies tied up the three witches while they slept on the marsh grass.

“How beautiful they are.” murmured the fairies admiringly. “You would never believe they were evil.”

At this moment the witches awoke. How surprised they were to find themselves captive! At first they couldn't believe it and when they did they began to cry.

Then Louis said, “They never really wanted to be wicked. They are that way because they have no hearts.”

“No hearts!” said Santa. “What an awful thing!”

“Yes,” agreed one of the witches. through her tears. “And you don't know what an awful thing it is to be a witch!”

“Well,” said Santa. “If all that is needed is a heart for each of you we can fix you up.” He called Mimi, the fairy who ran the doll shop in Santa Land. “Do you have any candy hearts with you?” he asked.

It happened that she did have three tiny candy hearts in her apron pocket. Santa gave the three hearts to the witches. “Eat them,” he said.

The witches quickly swallowed the candy hearts and then, while everyone looked on with popping eyes, a remarkable thing happened. The three sisters began to shrink and melt away until finally they were only 10 inches tall!

They were no longer witches but the most beautiful dolls in all the world. Santa leaned over and put his finger against each tiny chest and under his finger he could feel a candy heart. He put the dolls in his pocket and turned to his workers.

“Now, quickly - into the sleigh!” he cried. “There is not another moment to lose.”

Meanwhile, back in Santa Land, the little Princess had become very ill indeed. It was only one more day until Christmas and, you remember, the doctors had said unless Ruth smiled by Christmas day she would surely die.

“You must hang on a little longer,” begged Mrs. Claus. “Santa will be here very soon.”

“I'll try,” promised Ruth but it was easy to see her strength was going.

Then, on Christmas Eve morning, there was a knock at the door and Hoppy the Toad from Cameroon came in.

“Everyone in Cameroon is sorrowful,” he told Mrs. Claus. “The King's hair has turned white with grief and there will be no Christmas in the kingdom this year - nor perhaps ever again!”



Ruth overheard what Hoppy said and she got out of bed and began pulling on her clothes.

“I must return.” she said. “Perhaps I can give my father some happiness just by being with him at the end.”

Hoppy the Toad aid, “I can take you back very quickly.”

Mrs. Claus didn't try to stop Ruth. She knew it was best that the little girl return.

So it happened that Ruth had been gone from Santa Land for many hours when Santa returned. Little Louis was almost overcome. But Santa said, “After going through so much - don't give up yet!”

Then Santa ordered his workers to fill up his sleigh with Christmas toys. In a very few minutes you could hardly see the sleigh at all - it was so filled with drums and bows and arrows and doll houses and toy stoves and all such gifts for children all over the world.

“Come now,” said Santa to Louis. “And we will take a Merry Christmas to Cameroon.”

Conclusion

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AT LAST

When Christmas Eve came to Cameroon there was no rejoicing in any home. Princess Ruth had returned safely from Santa Land but there was still no smile on her face and by now her heart was very nearly squeezed dry.

But still the people tried to please her. The king set up a Christmas tree in Ruth's room and everyone in the kingdom brought a gift hoping that one at least would bring her joy.

What gifts there were! There was a toy lamb with white fleece. He could say "baa-baa" like a real live one. There was a doll house with a marble staircase and a lighted candle in every window. There was a rocking chair that played a song when it was rocked.

Every toy you could possibly dream of was laid under the great Christmas tree. The king took up each one and held it for his daughter to see.

"Just look!" he exclaimed. "Surely this must give you joy!"

But the poor princess would look at the toy and then turn to her father and sadly shake her head. Then the king wept and all the people standing at the door wept and all in the courtyard below were sorrowful.

Then, when all hope had been given up, there was the sound of sleigh bells and down out of the sky thundered Santa in his sleigh and Louis curled on the seat beside him.

Everyone ran into the courtyard to stare. In her bedroom the little princess heard the bells and her heart began to thud with hope. She got out of bed and ran to the window just in time to see Louis leap from the sleigh and come running up the palace steps. She saw something in his hands and the throb of her heart grew stronger and stronger.

In a moment the boy had burst into the room and behind him pushed all the people of Cameroon. Without a word Louis placed the beautiful ivory music box in the little girl's hands.

How her fingers trembled as she laid the box on the table and slowly opened the lid! And then what magic there was in that room! Never before in this world had such music been heard.

The strange melody filled every heart with such gladness that some wept and some turned away to hide their joy.

But the miracle was for the Princess Ruth. For, as she listened to the music and watched the little ivory figures climbing from the box to dance about the table, an enchanted smile came on her face and grew and grew.

The doctors rushed for their tape measure and laid it from one end of the princess' smile to the other.

"Three and one-quarter inches!" they announced gravely.

Then the joy of the people knew no bounds. Ruth hugged and kissed Louis and the king offered him half his kingdom. But the boy said he would rather stay on as the gardener's helper. Then Ruth said it did not matter because some day they would be married and then Louis would have all the kingdom.

In the midst of the rejoicing there were sudden shouts of astonishment from the courtyard below. It seemed that, while everyone was listening to the magic music box, Santa Claus had driven away. But he had left behind a mountain of gifts for all the children of Cameroon.

Among the gifts was a special package for the princess. When the little girl opened it she found three beautiful dolls.

"They are the loveliest dolls I've ever seen!" she cried. "And just feel - they have tiny hearts in their breasts!"

Only Louis knew that the dolls had once been the Witches of Poldrex.

Suddenly there was the sound of sleigh bells again. Rushing to the window Louis and Ruth saw Santa's sleigh far far up in the sky.

"Merry Christmas!" shouted the children. "Merry Christmas!"

"A Merry Christmas to you!" waved back Santa.

And a Merry Christmas to all the world!

THE END



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