



Santa and the SECRET ROOM

by LUCRECE HUDGINS BEALE



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Chapter 1

THE SOLDERS CALL

Listen, now, and I'll tell you the strangest story ever told. A story of giants and elves and a pot of gold; of a lost princess and a secret room and Santa Claus in trouble.

There are folks who'll say none of this is true. But they're wrong. It's all true. I know. Because I was there and I saw it all.

My name is Alexander. I have seven brothers and seven sisters. I'm the youngest. I have no ma and no pa but my sisters and brothers take care of me.

We live in a little old house at the end of a crooked road. My sisters sleep in the house while we boys bed down in the barn.

My story begins on a snowy, windy night just before Christmas. We were all gathered around the fire in the kitchen the way we always do at close of day.

Amanda, my oldest sister, was reading us a story about Santa Claus and how he had saved the life of a boy who had never believed in Santa.

The rest of us were stringing cranberries and making colored paper ropes to hang on our Christmas tree. It was nice and warm and loving in that kitchen by the fire. I was happy just lying there on my back listening to the story and thinking about the marshmallows we would be toasting by and by.

Suddenly there was a bang, bang, bang at the door and a voice shouting, "Open up in the name of the King!"

My sister dropped her book. No one else moved because, honest, I don't know how long it had been since anyone had come knocking at our door!

Bang, bang, bang came the knocking again.

Amanda said quietly, "Best to see what it is, Thomas."

So Thomas, my oldest brother, pulled back the bolt and opened the door. Three great, big soldiers marched right in. My eyes nearly popped from my head. I'd never been that close to soldiers before.

They lined us up three deep by the kitchen wall and asked us our names and ages and where we'd spent the day. Then the biggest soldier took a paper from his pocket and began to read:

"Princess Anne has been kidnapped from the royal palace. The King commands all his people to search for the kidnapper and recover his daughter without delay."

After that the soldiers stomped out of the house. We all began to talk at once.

What a shame! What a horror!" exclaimed my sisters. "The poor little thing!"

"Whoever took her would be far away by now," said my brothers. "They'd never dare to stay in the kingdom."

"What about Christmas?" I cried. "Will we have Christmas just the same?"

"Oh, Alexander," said Amanda. "Of course we will!"

They kept on talking and it was much, much later than usual when Thomas finally said, "Time for bed, Alexander, Get to the barn." I always have to go when he says it's time, so I took the lantern and ran quickly to the barn.



I heard breathing inside!

But when I got to the barn I'd hardly put my foot in the doorway when I stopped in my tracks. Plain as day I heard breathing inside!

It wasn't the cow and it wasn't the hens or the hog. It was a person breathing, I know cause there's a difference between man and beast that you can feel inside of you, even when you can't see at all.

Quick as a lick I knew what it was.

"It's the kidnapper!" I thought. "He's hiding inside!"

Chapter 2

A STRANGE STORY

As soon as I knew there was someone in the barn I turned around and ran back to the house.

The snow was piled in drifts and still coming down and I was so scared I couldn't see at all. Suddenly I tripped. The lantern flew from my hands and the light went out. I staggered on and in the dark. I was certain there was someone at my heels.

I shouted, "Help! Help!" and threw myself at the kitchen door.

Thomas opened the door and I hurtled in. "He's out there!" I screamed. "He's in the barn!"

All my brothers and sisters gathered around. "Who, Alexander? Who is in the barn?"

"The kidnapper of the Princess Anne! I heard him breathing there. I think he means to kidnap us all!"

Well, they were just as excited as I was. Thomas said, "Come on! What are we waiting for?" He took me by the hand and we all went back to the barn, the girls carrying lanterns and the boys carrying axes and broom sticks and heavy iron pots.

But when we got there the kidnapper was gone. We listened and hunted but we couldn't find anybody

Amanda smoothed my hair. "Poor Alexander," she said. "It was all your imagination. You mustn't worry about Princess Anne. She will be found and the kidnaper punished, too. Now go to bed and think about it no more."

They left me there alone and I crawled up into the loft. But as soon as I'd put out the lantern and settled down in the hay I heard it again - plain as before. It was somebody breathing and it was close by my side.



"No one kidnapped me. I ran away"

This time I didn't run away. I reached down suddenly into the hay.

And it was somebody all right. I fastened my arms around him and cried; "Now I have you whoever you are!"

Then, to my astonishment, whoever it was started to wiggle and cry.

"Let me go! Oh, you're hurting me!"

I couldn't believe my ears for surely only a girl would carry on so.

I got up and lit the lantern and there, sure enough, was a girl half smothered in the hay. She was a golden haired child in a flimsy blue dress and I thought for a moment she was a fairy who had wandered away from some sunny fairy land.

"A-a-r-e you a fairy?" I whispered.

She sobbed and shook her head. Then suddenly I knew. If she wasn't a fairy she was a princess.

"You're Anne!" I cried. "You're Princess Anne! Who kidnapped you? Who brought you here?"

She stopped sobbing and looked at me. "No one kidnapped me. I ran away!"

"Ran away! But your father, the king! He is frantic and my sisters say he will die of a broken heart if you aren't returned."

"It's not true!" cried the princess. "He's wicked. I'm afraid of him. He is going to do something awful to me."

"Why?" I asked, "people he is the kindest of men and rules wisely and well."

"He used to," moaned the princess. "And I always loved him. But suddenly he is changed. He spends all his time in a secret room."

"Secret room!" I whispered. "What is in there?"

"I don't know, I don't know! Whoever has gone into that room with him has never come out again!"

Chapter 3

WE MAKE A WISH

When Princess Anne told me of the king's secret room and of the strange way he acted I was frightened, too.

"Have you told anyone else?" I asked.

"I told my nurse that father had changed and that I was afraid of him. She said she felt the same. Then one day he called her to him in the secret room."

"What happened? What did she see in the room?"

"I don't know," moaned the little princess. "She never appeared again!"

There was a long moment when neither of us spoke and I could hear the pounding of my heart. Then the princess said, "That my father sent for me and told me I was to meet him at noon in the secret room."

"And so that is why you ran away!"

She nodded, "I ran and ran until I came to this barn and now, oh now I don't know where to go or what to do!"

I was scared half to death. I didn't know what to do either. So, I took the princess' hand and said, "Come on, we've got to get out of here"

We dropped out of the loft and slipped out of the barn. Just in time, too, cause here came all seven brothers to bed and I knew they'd never understand why the princess was frightened and they'd want to return her to the king.

We hid behind a bush until they'd all gone, Then we went down the road as fast as we could and all the time I kept thinking, "Where can we go?" Everyone in the kingdom would be searching for the princess and no home would dare to give her shelter for fear of the king.

All at once there came a jingle, jangle of horses and we leaped into a ditch at the side of the road. A whole troop of soldiers came galloping by swinging lanterns and waving their swords. I knew they were hunting the princess.

After they had gone we lay there in the ditch and the princess said, "Oh, dear, there's no where I can go!"

I thought she was right until all of a sudden I remembered the story my sister had read that very night about Santa Claus and how he'd helped a boy who didn't believe in him.

"If Santa would do that he'd surely help someone who does believe in him," I thought. I turned to the princess and said, "Come on. We'll go to Santa Land. Santa's not afraid of anything and he will certainly know what to do."

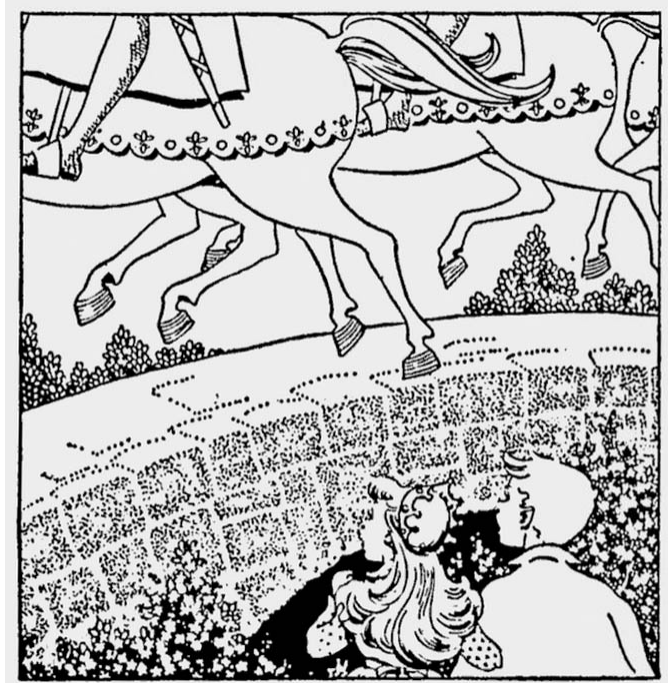
"Oh, wonderful!" cried the princess. "How do we get there?"

"Well, I'd never been there but I'd heard stories about other folks going and I knew there were lots of ways."

"One way," I said, "Is to swallow a magic pill."

"But we don't have a pill," protested the princess.

"Well," I said, "another way is to let the wind blow us - see, like this," But though there was a strong wind blowing, it



A whole troop of soldiers galloped by

didn't blow us anywhere. "Well," I said, "we could just walk north and sooner or later we'd be bound to get to the North Pole."

The princess felt her pale blue slippers and I knew she was thinking she could never make it. So I said, "I have heard you can get there by wishing. Let's try that."

We stood hand in hand at the side of the road and closed our eyes tight and wished and wished we were in Santa Land.

Suddenly there was the king's horses coming back up the road. I opened my eyes too late because they were almost on us and we were too scared to move.

Chapter 4

CALHOUN MCGILLICUDDY

“Whoa!” shouted the captain of the king’s soldiers. He pulled his horse to a standstill just an inch from my nose.

The other horses halted behind him. The soldiers held their lanterns high and peered down at the princess and me shivering there in the road

“Who are you?” asked the captain, “What are you doing here?”

“I - I am Alexander,” said in a very small voice, “And this is my sister. We we’re just standing here making a wish. Honest, that’s all!”

“What nonsense! What kind of a wish, pray tell me?”

I hated to tell him. I knew it would make him mad. But I had to do it. I said, “We were wishing we could go to Santa Land.”

The captain jumped down from his horse. “You’re taking me for a fool. Now I’ll tell you something. This girl looks very much like the Princess Anne!”

He ran his hands over the princess’ yellow curls and bent down to look into her eyes. ‘Are you?’ he asked. “Are you the Princess Anne?”

I felt like I might faint dead away but I squeezed the princess’ hand tight in mine and cried, “Sir, she’s dumb! She can’t talk at all.”

The captain straightened and scratched his head. Then he said, “Well, the whole thing’s funny somehow and I’m taking you both to the palace for the king to see.”

He turned to his soldiers. “Will one of you take these two up on your horse?” Before the nearest man could move, a white cloaked soldier at the very end of the line came up on a great white horse. “I’ll take them, sir,” he said. “My horse is the biggest of all.” Without waiting for the captain to answer, he leaned down and plucked the princess and me right off our feet and planted us in front of him on the big white horse.

We struggled and cried but he held us there and wrapped us around with his cloak,

The captain said, “I don’t remember you, soldier. What’s your name?”

“Calhoun McGillicuddy.” replied the soldier. “I joined your troop at the last turn in the road.”

The captain scratched his head again. Finally he said, “Oh, very well. Carry on!” Then he mounted his horse and the whole troop galloped away with the white horse at the end of the line.

It was snowing hard and we could not see beyond the horse’s head. After a while we couldn’t even hear the horses in front. We went faster and faster until it seemed that we were not galloping but flying through a great white space.

On and on for hours and hours we went until at last the horseman spoke. “Look now! We’re almost there!”

This was too much for the princess. She burst into tears.

What’s this?” growled the horseman, peeking under the cloak. “Why tears when you’re getting your wish?”

“Oh, sir,” I said, “it isn’t our wish to see the king.”

“The king!” exclaimed Calhoun McGillicuddy. “You’re not going to see the king. You’re going to see Santa Claus!”

“Oh, mercy me!” cried the princess. She threw her arms around my neck and wept for joy.

“You mean,” I stammered, “you mean you came in answer to our wish to get to Santa Land and you’re not a soldier at all?”

“Of course I’m not a soldier.” said McGillicuddy. “Could a soldier fly?”

“Are we flying?”

“Look down and see.”

I did and there, sure enough, were lights beneath us, shining through the snow.

“There!” said McGillicuddy “That’s Santa Land below.”



Lights beneath us shone through the snow

Chapter 5
IN SANTA LAND

The princess and I peered down at the beautiful sight below.

“Santa Land!” cried Princess Anne joyfully. “Just think your wish really came true” I forgot the awful fright we’d had with the soldiers and I boasted, “I told you there were lots of ways to get to Santa Land. You just have to keep trying until you get the right one.”

“Hold on, now,” said McGillicuddy. “We’re landing.”

Down, down, down dropped the flying horse. He circled three times and came to a halt. There we were before a small white house and on the door was plainly written:

“Santa Claus.”

The princess and I slid to the ground and raced up the steps to bang on the shutter.

“Who’s there?” boomed a voice.

“Tis I,” said the horseman behind us. “Calhoun McGillicuddy.”

The door opened and there was Santa himself, all round and smiling and rosy and warm. I thought he was the grandest looking thing in the whole world and it made me feel good and safe and beaming inside just to be there by his side.

“Well, children,” he said as he led us to the fire. “It’s a good thing I took an early snooze this evening or I might not have gotten your message.”

“What message?” I asked.

“Why, your wish to come to Santa Land,” Santa pointed to a roly poly pillow on the sofa nearby “That’s my Wishing Pillow. When anyone makes a wish while I’m snoozing on my Wishing Pillow, the wish pops right into my heed. When I wake up I try to make the wish come true.”

“Oh, my,” breathed the princess. “Then you sent that soldier to save us?”

“I’m not a soldier!” interrupted Calhoun McGillicuddy. “I’m Santa’s Wishing Elf.” He threw off his white cloak and sure enough he was an elf and not a man.

“Dear me,” said Santa suddenly. “I forgot what a long cold ride you’ve had.” He went to the door and called to his wife. “Could we have a light snack? Say some gingerbread and chocolate cake and lemon pie. And perhaps some apple tarts and peppermint milk shakes, too.”

Well, in just two seconds, in came Mrs. Santa with a tray big as a house and on it everything Santa had asked for and a bucket of coconut cookies, too.

We ate it all - even the crumbs. Then Santa said, “Now tell me, children, why you wished so hard to come to Santa Land. It’s only a few days to Christmas and I would have visited you soon.”

“Oh, Santa,” cried the princess, “I’m afraid there may not be a Christmas in my kingdom now or ever again.”



Santa puffed his pipe and listened carefully

Then she told Santa about her father and how he had always been a wonderful king until 30 days ago. Now he spent his days in a secret room and whoever went into that room with him never came out again. And just today he had ordered the princess into the room and that is why she had run away.

Santa puffed his pipe and listened carefully to the princess’ story. When she finished he sat there nodding his head for a long time and gazing into the fire.

Finally he said, “There’s only one way to find out what’s in that room.”

We looked at him and we waited and we didn’t dare speak or hardly breathe at all.

And then he said, “We’ll have to go in there and see for ourselves.”

Chapter 6

WORK IN SANTA LAND

“Yes,” said Santa. “We must go and have a look at this strange secret room of the king.”

“Oh, dear,” cried the princess. “Whoever has gone in that room with him has never come out.”

“We’ll go in when he isn’t there.” said Santa.

Calhoun McGillicuddy jumped up from the rug where he’d been curled in front of the fire.

“This sounds dangerous. After all, I’m your errand elf. Send me in your place.”

“Oh, no,” said Santa. “You can’t have all the fun. I like adventure, too, and this sounds like something I’d hate to miss.”

McGillicuddy sighed and threw himself down again. But hardly had his head touched the rug when he popped up again and shook his finger under Santa’s nose.

“You can’t go! What about Christmas? Who’s going to get the last toys finished and the sleigh loaded and all those things?”

“You and I are,” boomed Santa. “And the princess and Alexander. And all the workers in Santa Land. We’ll start in the morning and work through the day. By tomorrow midnight we’ll have my bags loaded and be on our way.”

“But it’s not Christmas Eve yet!” protested McGillicuddy.

“No matter,” said Santa. “I’ll have everything with me in case I decide to stay a few days with the king. Now, get to bed, one and all. And sleep tight because you don’t know when you’ll sleep again.”

The princess didn’t need Santa to tell her to sleep because during all the fuss she’d curled up on Santa’s Wishing Pillow and was already having her second dream. I just snuggled down beside the princess and at once I was asleep, too.

The next thing I knew Santa was shaking us all. “Come on, time for work!”

Before Mrs. Claus would let us out of the house she made us all have cocoa and cinnamon buns. Then Santa led us to the toy shop here the Santa Land workers were hammering and sawing and sewing.

In the middle of the shop was a mountain of toys. My mouth fell open and I just stood there because I never knew there were such toys in the world.

There were little stoves with real turkeys in their tiny ovens. There were jumping skates meant to be bounced instead of rolled.

Santa said, “Alexander, you finish the tops and the princess can finish the dolls.”

He gave the princess a pot of red paint and he gave me a pot of blue. Princess Anne put a rosy splash on the cheek of every doll and I put a blue zigzag around every musical top.

There we worked all the day until every doll and top was ready. Then we helped to load them into Santa’s bags.

The elves carried the bag to Santa’s sleigh and packed them in. Then they lifted the princess and me and packed us between the bags. Finally Santa climbed in and we were ready to go.

“Away, away,” called Santa, cracking his whip over the eight reindeer. And away we went, singing and laughing into the sky.

But as we left Santa Land my happiness faded away. I wondered what was ahead of us in the secret room of the king.



We worked all day until every doll and top was ready

Chapter 7

THE SECRET ROOM

The night was half gone when Santa's reindeer began slowly descending from the sky.

"Are we there? Are we there?" asked the princess. There was a tremble in her voice.

"We must be," said Santa. "The reindeer are always right. All I have to do is tell them where I visit to go and they always get me there."

We peered over the sides of the sleigh. There was nothing to be seen except the silent snow far below. Now the reindeer began to circle and suddenly we saw a monstrous shadow on the snow.

"Is that it?" asked Santa. "Is that the palace?"

"Y-yes," faltered the princess. "I guess it is. But I've never seen it so dark and fearful! There are no lights at the guard posts and none in the yards."

"Good," said Santa "No one can see us." He pulled at the reins. With scarcely a sound the reindeer brought the sleigh to a stop between turrets and chimneys on the roof of the palace.

"Now which chimney would lead to the room we're after?" wondered Santa.

"I know," said Princess Anne. "The room is on the first floor of the crooked tower. There - there's the tower and the chimney!"

I looked where she pointed. I saw a crooked tower at the corner of the palace. Santa took our hands and helped us across to the tower chimney.

"I'll lead the way," he whispered. "But first I'll tell you a secret known to no man on earth. It's my magic chimney climbing word. Remember it now. It's PETRONEENYMO."

With that, he climbed into the chimney and dropped out of sight. The princess and I were scared to follow but we were scared even more to stay behind. We went feet first into that black and spooky hole.

At first we just stuck there and never moved at all and I thought we were trapped forever. Then I remembered and I gasped, "PETRONEENYMO."

Instantly we floated gently down and a moment later Santa had our hands and we were out of the chimney and in the secret room. The princess' teeth chattered and my knees felt like they had come undone. But Santa boldly pulled out a candle, lit it and held it aloft.

I don't know what awful thing I had expected to see in this mysterious room but what I saw was a bunch of statues. Behind the statues were shelves loaded with bottles of strange colored liquids, powders and pills. On the floor books were piled in heaps.

"Well" said Santa. "There doesn't seem to be anything so strange here. The king comes here to read and admire his statues and take medicine for some ailment."

I felt my fears ease away. It had all been the princess' imagination, I thought. She had run away from nothing.

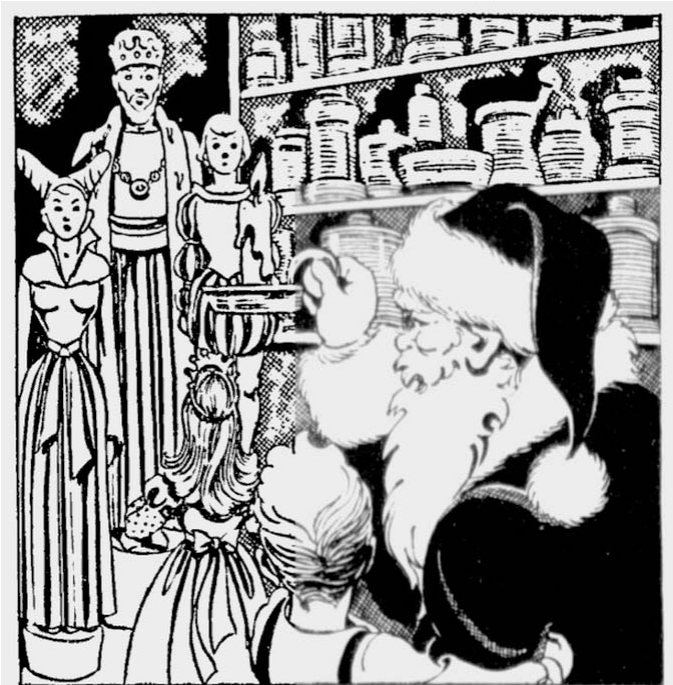
I turned to tell her so. She was standing before a statue of a man. Her eyes were fastened on the eyes of the statue and she was all a tremble in her arms and legs.

Suddenly she fell to the floor in a faint.

Santa leaned over her and smoothed her hair. "It's all right," he murmured. "Everything's all right, you see. There's nothing to fear."

At last she opened her eyes. They were filled with awful terror and she whispered, "You're wrong. There is something more dreadful here than anything I Imagined."

Santa started to speak but at that very moment we heard footsteps in the hail and the sound of a scratching at the door.



Santa pulled out a candle and lit it

Chapter 8

MYSTERY EXPLAINED

When we heard the sound at the door, Princess Anne sat up and blew out Santa's light.

"Hide! We must hide!"

"Now, child," said Santa gently. "I do not think the king is as bad as you think. Let us greet him if this is he at the door."

"No, no! We must hide!"

She pressed her fingers so fiercely into my arm I, too, became frightened. I expect Santa felt the same for he whispered, "Very well. Let's get behind the window curtains and watch from there."

Quickly we hid ourselves in the thick velvet curtains that covered the windows from ceiling to floor. It was easy to peep out from the deep folds of the curtains.

All this time there had been the strange scratching at the door. Now we heard a key turning in the lock. Slowly the door swung open and a hooded man shuffled into the room.

He held a lighted candle in his hand. He turned at the door and said, "Come, Whiskers. Walk briskly for who knows when you will walk again!"

I looked down and saw a tiny kitten who would not move. At last the king picked it up and carried it to the table.

He swung the hood back from his head and revealed his face and now I knew why the princess had been afraid. For though the face seemed kind enough, the darting eyes glittered strangely.

"The princess is right! He is a king to fear!" I thought. I reached out to hold her hand. But she stood there staring at her father. Her hands were in tight fists and he seemed not to feel me at all.

Now the king opened a book. As he read directions from it, he took down bottles and jars from the shelves. Carefully he measured powders and liquids and ointments into a bowl. Then he stirred. As he stirred he talked to Whiskers, the cat.

"This is Formula 23," he said with a twisted smile. "And you are lucky, Whiskers, because I think this will be the one that works and you will be the first golden cat."

The kitten crouched beside the bowl and meowed softly.

"And after that," cried the king, "why, everything I touch with my secret mixture will turn to gold."

He stirred his strange potion faster and faster. He beat it with a pestle and twirled it furiously under his thumbs. And all the time he talked to it, pleading with it, commanding it, to be the mixture he desired.

Finally, there was only a dust in the bowl. The king reached in with his hand and drew out a handful. Turning, he hurled the mixture into the kitten's eyes and cried, "Turn to gold. Whiskers! Turn to gold!"

The kitten leaped back, shuddered violently and then, before our astonished eyes, turned, not to gold, but to stone.



He poured the liquids into a bowl

At that very moment there was a cry at my side and Princess Anne flew out of the curtains and threw herself at the king.

"You're not my father! You're not the king!"

Before the startled creature could raise his hands she reached up with her fingers and tore at his face. Off the face came in her hands.

It was a mask of her father, the king.

Princess Anne turned away and pointed at the statue of a man standing behind her.

"This is my father" she moaned. "Like the kitten, you changed him to stone!"

Chapter 9

THE SORCERER

The unmasked pretender looked as though he were about to cry. His pale, round face quivered and his strange eyes blinked.

“So, little Princess! You’ve come home again! And now you know my secret. Yes, I turned your father to stone. Then I made a mask of his face so people would think I were the king. I did it so there would be no one to hinder me in my work.”

“W-what is your work?”

“I am a sorcerer,” whispered the creature. “I am searching for a powder that will turn anyone it touches into gold!”

He waved his hand at all the statues in the room. “So far I’ve not made just the right mixture and all I’ve managed is to turn people into stone. But, look now, there’s a trace of gold in the kitten’s paw. So I’m on the right path, you see.”

“You are a wicked creature!” cried the princess. “I shall tell and you will be locked away!”

The sorcerer took a step towards her. “But, my pet! I only want to turn you to gold!”

The princess stared into his blinking eyes and backed slowly to the wall. I felt a scream rising in my throat but just as I opened my mouth the curtains at the window were wrenched from their hangings and hurled across the room on the sorcerer’s head.

Santa shouted, “Come, Princess, take my hand!” He rushed to her side and dragged her to the chimney leaving the gold seeker struggling under the drapes.

But suddenly the princess broke from Santa’s grasp. The tears running down her cheeks.

“I can’t leave! If my father is gone then I am head of the kingdom. I cannot leave this sorcerer to rule my people!”

But it was too late. The sorcerer had gotten free of the drapes. He leaped over the table and threw a handful of dust on Princess Anne. She, too, turned to stone.

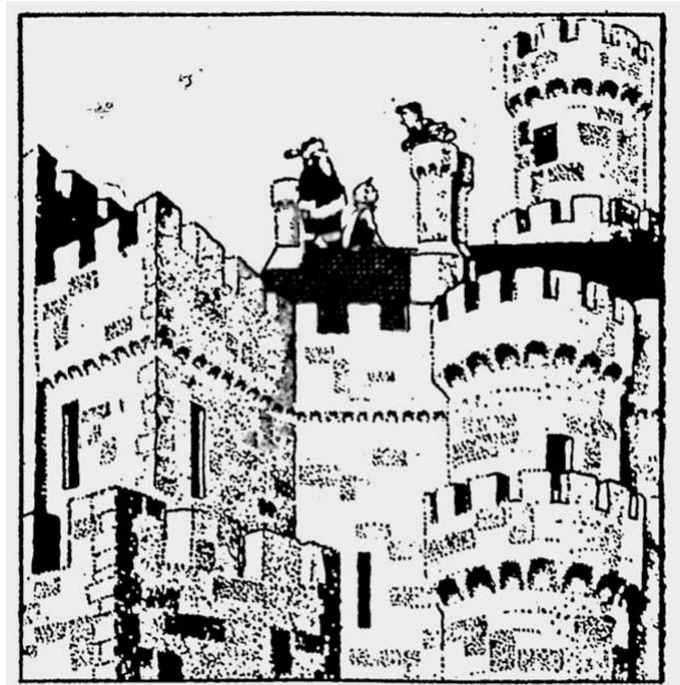
“So,” said the sorcerer at last. “You’ve been hiding in my room. Well, you can’t get out for I have the key.”

He moved to the powders and liquids on the table. The instant his back was turned, Santa motioned me toward the chimney. I crept into the fireplace and squatted there but oh, my! the magic word had gone out of my mind and I couldn’t rise up the chimney.

I beat on my head with my hands and I squeezed my eyes tight but the word wouldn’t come, until all of a sudden I heard Santa shout, “PETRONEENYMO! Say it, Alexander!”

And I screamed, “PETRONEENYMO!” and up the chimney I flew with Santa right behind.

But hardly had we reached the roof than out of the chimney came the sorcerer clutching his mixing bowl.



Out of the chimney came the sorcerer!

“So that’s the way to climb chimneys,” he said happily. “Thanks for teaching me the magic chimney word.” He reached into his bowl and drew out a handful of dust. “Now try my magic!”

He threw the mixture into our eyes.

But just as the sorcerer threw the dust, Santa gave me a mighty shove and I found myself sliding down the sloping roof. Suddenly I came to the edge and shot off into space. The next thing I knew I was lying in a snow drift.

I peered up through the grey dawn at the palace roof. I thought my heart would break when I saw Santa and his eight reindeer still standing there.

They could not move. They had turned to stone.

Chapter 10

NO ONE BELIEVES

With Santa Claus and the king and the princess turned to stone. I thought the world had come to an end.

I thought, I must get away from here and warn everyone in the kingdom. I pulled myself out of the snow and started to run. But that was a mistake because as soon as I moved I heard a shout.

“Get that boy! Get that boy!”

I turned and looked over my shoulder. There was the sorcerer standing at the palace door. He had put his mask back on so that he looked just like the king.

Be waved his arms wildly. The sleepy palace guards sprang to attention and looked around in confusion. They didn't know who they were supposed to go after and while they were finding out I shinnied over the palace wall.

Then I ran faster, I guess, than any boy ever ran before! Those guards never even got close to me though I could hear them shouting and running a long way behind.

Finally I got out of town and tumbled down the road that led to my home. Then I heard that old jingle, jangle and I knew the horse soldiers had been ordered to join the search.

I thought I was done for until I spied a giant oak tree standing near the road. I'm a good climber. It was easy for me to wiggle up that tree and in no time I was in the tip top branches.

I could see the horse soldiers coming. I thought, if they look up, they'll see me! But they never looked up. They weren't even galloping. They were walking along as though they had been riding for a long, long while and were tired out now.



I was in the tip-top branches

When they were underneath the tree I could hear them talking.

“We've searched every house and road In the kingdom. She's been taken out of the country and there's no use hunting through these roads anymore.”

Then I knew they weren't looking for me but for Princess Anne. I wanted to shout down to them, “She's in the palace! She's turned to stone! Go look in the king's secret room!”

But I was afraid they would take me first to the man they believed to be king. So I waited until they were gone. Then I slid down and ran to my home.

I was never so glad to see anything as I was that crooked old lane that lead to my door. Before I could reach the porch the door flew open and all my seven brothers and seven sisters poured out.

“Alexander! Where have you been! You've had us worried half to death!”

They took me into the kitchen. They were all talking at once and hugging me and bawling me out.

I pushed them all off. I said, “Oh, the most awful thing has happened! The king has been turned to stone and so has Princess Anne and so has Santa Claus and all his reindeer!”

Their mouths dropped open and they stared at me.

“Oh, do something!” I cried. “There's someone in the palace pretending to be king. He's trying to turn everyone into gold. Oh, what can we do to stop him?”

My sister Amanda dropped on her knees beside me. “Don't worry, Alexander. We'll make everything all right. Don't you worry at all.”

Oh, thank heavens! I thought. Now all will be well. But even as I thought it my heart dropped to my shoes for Amanda turned to Thomas and cried:

“Quickly, got a doctor! He's out of his head!”

Chapter 11

ANOTHER WISH

They put me to bed and sent for a doctor. I screamed and cried until I was nigh worn out but they only piled blankets on me and put hot water bottles at my feet.

“You’ve got to believe me!” I shouted. “You’ve got to do something or sooner or later we’ll all be turned to stone!”

But they went right on putting cold compresses on my head and feeling my pulse and shaking their heads.

At last the doctor came. I sprang out of bed and shouted, “Tell them I’m not sick! And hurry, hurry to the palace before it’s too late.”

They bundled me back into the bed and held me while the doctor thumped on my chest and wiggled my toes and looked at my tongue.

Finally he leaned back and said, “Hysteria. Caused probably by being lost in the snow. But don’t worry. He’ll be well enough by the time Santa comes to visit.”

I raised my head and I said as calmly as I could, “I’ve told you, Santa won’t come to visit. There won’t be any Christmas. Not for you or anyone.”

“There, there,” smiled the doctor. “You’ll feel differently tomorrow.”

After he had gone I lay there and wondered what I should do. If my own family wouldn’t believe me, who would? Then I had an idea.

I called them all to me and I said, “I can prove what I’m saying is true. Go and look at the palace roof. You’ll see Santa and his reindeer there. They can’t move because they’re turned to stone. Go see for yourselves.”



The doctor thumped on my chest

They really were curious. Amanda and Thomas decided to go. While they were gone I was happy because now they would believe me and do something about it.

Finally they came back. I sat up in bed and cried, “Well, I was right, wasn’t I? Isn’t Santa Claus there?”

Amanda nodded. “Yes, Alexander, he’s there. It’s the prettiest Christmas decoration I ever saw. Why, just imagine! The king has covered the whole roof of the palace with a make believe Santa and his reindeer and sleigh. People from all over the country are coming there to admire it. How wonderful of the king to think of the people when his heart must be broken because of his missing daughter.”

Then I knew it was all hopeless.

For a long time after the family had gone to bed I lay with my head under the pillow and cried. Finally I stopped and I thought, crying’s no good. I’ve got to do something. But, oh, I wish someone would help me! I beat the pillow with my fist and cried, “Oh, I wish Calhoun McGillicuddy were here!”

After that I guess I went to sleep because, by and by, I was awakened by a tap-tap-tapping at the door. I froze in my bed. I thought it was the soldiers come to get me. But the tapping went on and it was such a little bitty sound I thought, It can’t be soldiers!

I crept to the door. When I opened it, there was Calhoun McGillicuddy grinning at me.

“Well, Alexander, you wished for me and here I am,”

“Oh!” I whispered. “How did you know?”

“How could I miss knowing? There I was having a wonderful snooze on Santa’s Wishing Pillow when bong your wish smacked me in the head. Now what would you want me for when Santa’s right here?”

“Oh, Calhoun McGillicuddy, Santa’s gone!”

“Gone? Gone where?”

“Turned to stone!” I gasped. There was a tiny thud and Calhoun McGillicuddy dropped at my feet.

Chapter 12

THE AGREEMENT

When Calhoun McGillicuddy revived he grasped my hand. "Alexander, you've given me a mighty shock. Now tell me it's a joke and I'll forgive you, boy."

I told him it wasn't a joke. I told him how we had found a sorcerer in the palace who was pretending to be king and was searching for a mixture that would turn everyone into gold.

So far he had managed only to turn people into stone and that is what he had done to the real king and to the princess and to Santa.

"Oh, it's awful!" I cried. "No one will believe me and I don't know what to do!"

Calhoun McGillicuddy pounded his fist into his hand. "There's only one thing to do! Come with me, Alexander."

I wiggled into my clothes and went out with the elf.

"If the sorcerer has something that will turn people into stone he must have something that will turn them back again," said McGillicuddy. "It's up to you to get it from him."

"But, what can I do?"

"Offer gold to the sorcerer," said the elf. "If gold is what he wants then we will find him gold. Tell him you'll get him lots and lots of gold if he'll turn Santa and all those folks back to themselves."

"What if he turns me to stone?" I quavered.

"Sooner or later," said McGillicuddy, "he's going to turn everyone to stone."

I could see he was right. I went with him to the palace. He crept under a bush to wait for me.

I went up to the guard house. "The king is looking for me," I said.

The astonished guard took me into the palace and led me to the secret room.

The door opened a crack and the sorcerer reached out and drew me in.

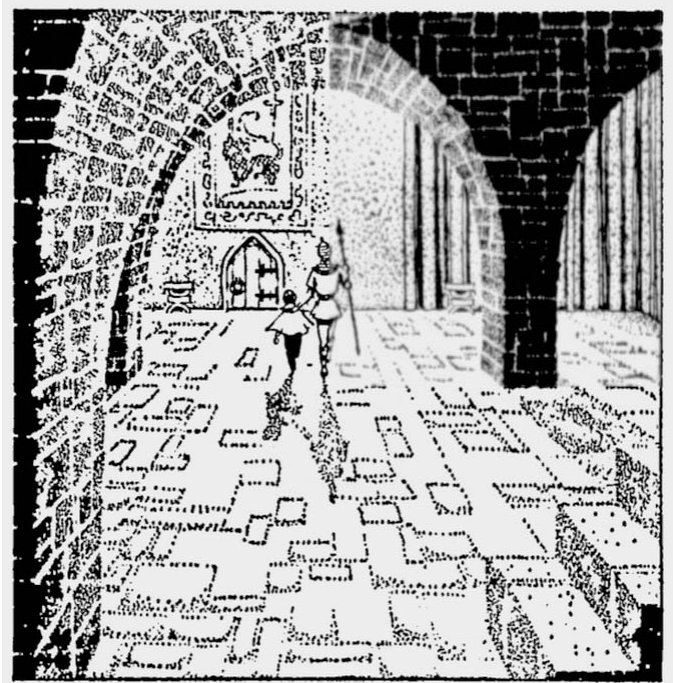
"Boy," he said happily, "am I glad to see you! I've mixed a new formula tonight and this is surely the right one. It is so powerful it will take three days to work. I will sprinkle it on you and in three days you will turn to gold!"

"Oh, sir!" I cried. "If it's gold you want I can get you lots of gold!"

His eyes glittered. "Can you now? Ah, that would be wonderful!"

"Yes," I said, "and then you won't have to keep experimenting and you won't have to try to turn people into gold."

He nodded eagerly. "I hate these experiments. I hate all this mixing of chemicals. I hate hurting people. But I must have gold. Tell me, boy, how much gold can you get me?"



The guard led me to the secret room

"Oh, lots! If you will make a powder that will turn Santa and everyone back into themselves I'll get you lots of gold!"

"I don't have to make anything," said the sorcerer. "I already have an ointment. I have only to rub it on the noses of the statues and they will return to life. But once turned back I can never change them again."

"Then you'll do it?"

"Yes," nodded the sorcerer. "I'll do it if you bring me a pot of gold."

"Oh, I'll bring you much more than a pot!"

"The pot I'm talking about never empties. No matter how much you take out it is always full."

My heart sank. "What pot is that?"

"Why," said he, "It's the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."

Chapter 13

GOLD RINGMAKERS

“That’s impossible!” I cried. “Whoever could get the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow?”

“Not I,” said the sorcerer sadly. “If I could I wouldn’t have to turn people into gold. But I thought perhaps you might get it for me because I must have gold!”

“But,” I protested, “It would take time and in three days it will be Christmas. If Santa isn’t turned out of stone by then there’ll be no Christmas in all the world!”

“True, true,” said the gold seeker. “So in order to make you hurry I’ll sprinkle this latest powder on you.”

I twisted and turned and kicked but I could not escape him. The awful dust fell on my face.

“In three days you will turn to gold. But if you bring me before then the bottomless pot of gold from the end of the rainbow I shall free you and all your friends from the spell.”

He turned me loose and I fell to the floor. He rushed to the door and opened it. “Go!” he ordered. “Get me gold or you will turn to stone.”

I stumbled out, dazed and frightened and sure that I’d already turned to stone. I ran out of the place and found McGillicuddy waiting for me under the bush,

“What did he say? Did he agree to turn Santa back into himself if you brought him gold?”

“Yes,” I gasped. “But only if I bring him a pot of gold.”

“Why that’s easy enough! Only a pot of gold!”

“You don’t understand. It must be the bottomless pot of gold from the end of the rainbow!”

I sank down on my heels and buried my face in my hands.

McGillicuddy clicked his tongue. “Tis Impossible. ‘Tis out of this world!”

“But it must be done,” I whispered, “or I, too, will turn to stone.”

Then I told him how the sorcerer had sprinkled me with a dust that would not work for three days. If I brought back the gold in that time he would put ointment on my nose that would save me.

“But I can never find this pot of gold!” I cried. “I don’t even know where to begin to look.”

McGillicuddy scratched his head. ‘One thing leads to another,’ he drawled. “Now I’ve been thinking that if we start at the very end we might trace things back to the very beginning. That way we might get to the pot of gold.”

I could not understand what he meant. I cried crossly, ‘Talk Sense! There’s no time for fooling.’”

“I am talking sense,” the elf insisted. He pulled a tiny gold ring from his pocket. “A brownie friend made this ring for me.

We’ll go to find where he got the gold to make the ring. Maybe he got it from the pot of gold we are searching for.”

“How do we find your brownie friend?” I asked.

“Climb on my back,” ordered McGillicuddy.

I stared down at him. I am very small but he was not half my size and I thought if I got on his back I would squash him to the ground.

But I did as he told me and he did not squash. He either got bigger or I got smaller.

Suddenly he was running off through some woods and I was fast asleep.

When I woke I found we were in a village of mushroom houses. In the middle of the village square was a large sign saying, “Brownieville. Home of the Gold Ring Makers.”

I knew it was here our search began.



Suddenly he was running through the woods

Chapter 14

THE GOLD WITCH

The brownies in Brownieville work for Santa Claus. They make all the gold jewelry that Santa brings at Christmas time. They were surprised to see Calhoun McGillicuddy.

“What brings you here?” asked Alonzo, the head brownie. “Have you some last minute jewelry orders from Santa?”

“I only wish I had!” said the elf. He told them the awful story of how Santa had been turned to stone.

The brownies were horrified. “Then there will be no Christmas ever again! Whatever will happen to us all?”

“The sorcerer who did it wants gold,” said McGillicuddy. “If we bring him the bottomless pot of gold from the end of the rainbow he will turn Santa back into himself. That is why we have come to you. We thought perhaps you got your gold from the rainbow pot and that you would load us to it.”

“Alas,” said Alonzo. “I have never seen the pot at the end of the rainbow. We get our gold from the Witch of Witherspoon. She has great chests filled with gold. She gives us what we need and in return we make Halloween brooms for her and her sisters.”

“Then we must go to the witch and find where she gets her gold,” said McGillicuddy, “What way do we take to get there?”

“The way is long,” said Alonzo. “But we have recently finished a broom meant for her. Get on and it will take you to her.”

He gave us a black broom. The elf and I mounted it and sailed away. I don’t know how long or how far we went but at last we came down out of the sky near a great pile of chests.

Sitting on the top chest was a beautiful creature. I climbed up to her and said, “Can you tell us, please, where we might find the Witch of Witherspoon?”

She smiled sweetly. “I am!”

My surprise must have shown in my face for she laughed. “You think I should be ugly and wearing a tall black hat?”

I nodded.

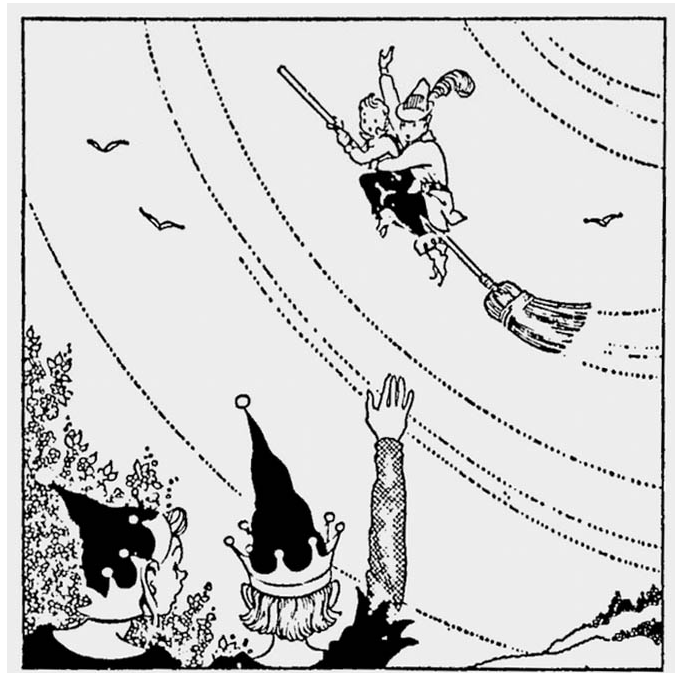
“That’s only my costume for Halloween,” she explained. By this time McGillicuddy had climbed up to us and the witch said, “I know you. I’ve seen you when I visited in Santa Land. How is my dear friend Santa?”

“Turned to stone,” said the elf. Then he told her of the spell and of our need for gold.

“Take all my gold!” cried the witch. “Those chests are full of it, Take it all if it will save Santa!”

“It’s not enough,” said the elf. “We must take the pot of gold from the end of the rainbow. Did your gold come from there?”

“No,” moaned the witch. “I get my gold from Gustavius the Giant. Where he gets it I do not know. But wait with me. He



The elf and I mounted it and sailed away

passes every day. Perhaps he’ll know where to find the rainbow pot.”

We settled down on the chests of gold and the Witch of Witherspoon told us ghost stories to get our minds off our trouble.

McGillicuddy said there had been a ghost once in Santa Land. Every night the reindeer disappeared from the stables. The next morning they would be back, exhausted and dripping with sweat. One night one of the elves hid in the sleigh to see what happened. By and by, a ghost came in and drove the reindeer to some faraway ghost land where he delivered gifts to all the little ghosts who lived there.

“Good gracious!” cried the Witch of Witherspoon. “Whatever happened to him?”

Before the elf could answer I leaped to my feet.

“Look, look!” I screamed. “I am turning to stone!”

Chapter 15
THE GIANT

It was true. I was turning to Stone.

I had lost all feeling in one of my hands. The fingers were gray and stiff and when I raised my hand it was heavy like a stone.

The Witch of Witherspoon threw her arms around me. "What is happening to him?"

"The sorcerer sprinkled a magic formula on him," said McGillicuddy. "It was meant to turn him into gold in three days."

"But surely the three days aren't up yet!" I cried.

"Not yet," said the elf. "We still have time."

But I knew he was only trying to cheer me and he didn't really have much hope left. I tried to be brave, too, and not notice my hand. The three of us sat there and waited and waited. Finally, the witch said in a whisper, "He comes! Listen!"

I listened and, sure enough, I heard some faraway sound, like a drum beating, boom, boom, boom. Louder and louder it grew until it pounded in my ears and the boxes we sat on rattled and the whole earth seemed to shake.

And suddenly I saw him: Gustavius the Giant plodding over the mountains and across the lakes and heading straight for us. When he was a mile away he waved his hand and I felt the breeze of it ruffling my hair.

"Greetings!" he said to the witch when at last he arrived. His voice was kind and gentle and soft. He dropped a huge sack of gold from his back. "Are these people looking for hearts of gold? I make them you know."

"No," explained the witch. "They are looking for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. We hope you get your gold from there and can take them to it."

Then McGillicuddy told Gustavius of all our troubles. The giant said he would do anything to save Santa Claus. He said Santa had never failed at Christmas to fill his stocking, big as it was, and it would be wonderful if now he could do something for Santa.

"I do indeed get my gold from the end of the rainbow," he said. "But it is not at the end where lies the pot of gold. My goodness! If I laid a little finger on the rainbow it would fall to pieces! I have to wait at one end and the Goldies bring me the gold from over the rainbow."

"The Goldies? Who are they?"

"They are the fairies who guard the rainbow and the pot of gold at the end. Come along, I will take you to them."

Calhoun McGillicuddy climbed on one of the giant's shoes and I climbed on the other. Then, away he went.

Finally the feet came to a rest and I slid down from the shoes. I looked around and I saw a most beautiful sight. There, before me, was a pool of blue and pink and yellow and purple mist. Rising out of the pool, was the rainbow itself.

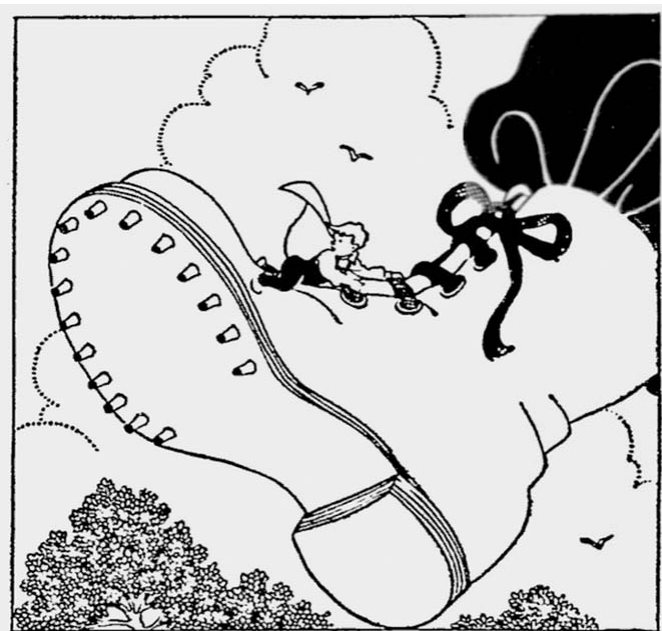
It arched across the sky and, as I looked, I saw a group of golden fairies come dancing down the arc.

"There they are!" said Gustavius. "They're the Goldies!"

The fairies spread their golden wings and drifted down at our feet.

"Oh, Gustavius!" they scolded. "You're back so soon! Have you used up all your gold and need more already!"

The giant shook his head sadly. "This time," he said, "I need all your gold."



I climbed on the giant's shoe

Chapter 16

THE POT OF GOLD

The Goldies stared at Gustavius. Their wings fluttered gently.

“All our gold? You want all our gold?”

“Oh yes, please,” I broke in, “You see we have to have it to save Santa Claus or there’ll never be Christmas again and if -”

I stopped because suddenly I had a funny feeling in my nose and ears. I reached up and felt them. They had turned to stone “Oh, hurry, hurry!” I cried. “Please give us the gold!”

Then Calhoun McGillicuddy told them the whole story. As soon as they had heard it the Goldies took our hands.

“You may have it all!” they cried. “What use would the gold be to anyone if Santa and Christmas were gone?”

They led the elf and me up the arch of purple and yellow and blue. It was like walking in a dream. I had no weight but just drifted along. Up, up into the very top of the sky we went. Then the arc curved and we went floating down. At the bottom we found we were in a marvelous fairy land and there, at the end of the rainbow, was a tiny pot of gold

“It’s so small!” I exclaimed. “Are you sure this is it?”

“It is small,” said the fairies, but it is never empty. No matter how much we take out it is always full to the brim. Now take it all, it is yours.”

I reached down to pick it up. It was too heavy. I could not lift it. McGillicuddy put his strong arms around it and heaved. It would not move. Then the fairies tried. Then all of us together. We pushed and pulled and lifted with all our might. It would not budge the tiniest bit.

I turned away. Now it was all over. Santa would never be saved. Nor the princess. Nor I.

But suddenly Calhoun McGillicuddy was pounding me on the back. “If you can’t take the pot of gold to the sorcerer,” he cried, “go bring the sorcerer to the pot of gold!”

“Don’t you see? All the sorcerer wants is to look at gold, to run it through his fingers and pile it up and count it. He can do that here. He can be the gold keeper for the fairies and be happy forever. Don’t you see?”

“We see! We see!” cried the fairies happily. “Go quickly, Alexander, and bring the sorcerer to us.”

But I could not move. My legs were stiff and there was something hard in my chest. I knew my heart was turning to stone.

“I can’t move,” I sobbed and I fell to the ground.

McGillicuddy leaped forward. “I’ll go myself!” he shouted.

He charged furiously away but as soon as he set a foot on the rainbow he sank over his head into the blue and gold mist.

Two fairies rushed to rescue him. “You can’t cross the rainbow without our hands to hold you.” they chided him. Then they brushed the colored flakes from his eyes and guided him safely over the arc.

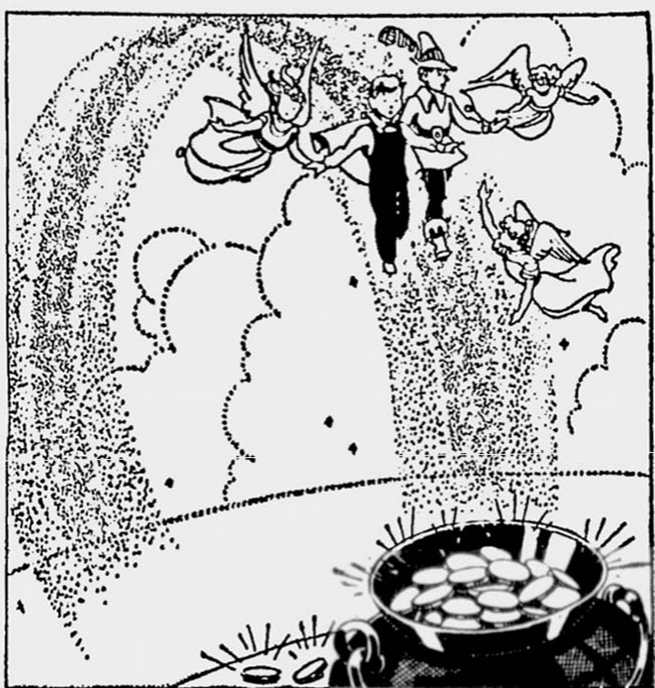
I turned my head and spoke to the fairies who stayed behind. “The sorcerer said if he didn’t get the gold in three days he would not give me the cream that would turn Santa back to life. The time is nearly up for I am nearly stone.”

But the fairies weren’t listening. They were taking gold out of the tiny pot and piling it up. Presently I saw they had made a house of gold.

“What’s that for?” I asked,

“For the sorcerer. So he’ll be happy here and never cause trouble again.”

My eyelids grew heavy. “Too late,” I whispered. “Too late.”



It was like walking in a dream

Chapter 17

A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

Little by little I turned into stone, But just I thought I was gone forever I heard a great noise. I opened my eyes and I saw two golden fairies coming down the rainbow.

They were leading Calhoun McGillicuddy by the hand. On McGillicuddy's back was the sorcerer.

A moment later the elf dumped the sorcerer by the pot of gold. "There," he said, "It's all just as I promised you!"

The sorcerer looked at the gold. His eyes grow large. His face softened.

"Gold," he whispered. "Gold!" He was about to dip his hands into the pot but McGillicuddy maid, "First the boy!"

"Oh, yes," said the sorcerer. He reached in his pocket and drew out a jar of cream. He rubbed a bit of it on my nose and instantly the feeling came back into my limbs and I was myself again.

Then the sorcerer dropped down by the pot and ran his hands through the gold. Tears ran down his cheeks. "I'm so happy," he sobbed. "Now I don't have to change people to gold. Here is all the gold I've ever wanted."

"You will be the guardian of the gold," said a fairy. "But you can never leave here. If you try to cross the rainbow without our help you will sink in the golden mist."

"Leave?" cried the sorcerer. "Oh, please don't ever make me leave. I will be a good guardian. I swear it! And here," he added, turning to McGillicuddy. "Take this cream to your friends in the palace. And tell them to send to me if they ever have need of gold."

"McGillicuddy took me by the hand. "Come, we must hurry," he said. "It is Christmas Eve."

As we travelled I began to think about my seven brothers and seven sisters and how I'd worried them so McGillicuddy must have known my mind because he said, "Alexander, I'm taking you home."

He dropped me off at my own door and said goodbye. "Thank you," I said, "for everything."

When I went In my house there was no one there. I went to the barn. It was empty. I was tired but there was one thing I had to do. I went back in the house and I hung fifteen stockings on the mantle over the kitchen chimney. Then I went back to the barn and dropped into the hay.

The next thing I knew my seven brothers and seven sisters wore all about me.

"He's here! He's come home at last!" they cried.

"And, Alexander, you need not worry about the princess any more. She's been found," cried Amanda, "We've been in town looking for you everywhere. While we were there the palace suddenly lighted up. Every window! And the king came out in the public square and with him was Princess Anne. They looked so happy! So you see it was all a bad dream you had about them after all."

I nodded and smiled to myself.

"And one thing more," said Amanda. "Oh, I wish you could have seen it! You know the Christmas decoration on the palace roof? While we stood there Santa actually climbed in the sleigh and the reindeer pulled him away. Of course they did it with strings and magnets but truly, it looked just like real!"

After they'd all gone to bed I lay there in the dark and I thought, Were all my adventures real? Or did they just look real?

Suddenly I know the answer. For there was the clear sound of jingling bells and through the loft window I saw a sleigh circling right over my own house.

My heart filled with joy because I could hear Santa calling, "Merry Christmas, Alexander! Merry Christmas to all!"

THE END



I hung 15 stockings on the mantel

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