



## Santa and the Elf Boy

By Lucrece Hudgins Beale

### Chapter 1

#### ONE LAST CHANCE

Once upon a time, in far away Fairyland, there lived a freckle-faced elf named Esteban.

He was so tiny he could have slipped into your coat pocket and you never would have known he was there. He had wings and, although they were small wings, they were beautiful and he could fly with them anywhere on earth.

He was the happiest and gayest creature in Fairyland. But alas! Everything he did was wrong and he was always, always in trouble.

Once when he was helping the tooth fairies he collected an enormous sack of baby teeth from under the pillows where the children had left them.

But, he forgot to leave any nickels behind. When he remembered he went back to all the houses he had visited, but he was in such a hurry he put the nickels under all the wrong pillows.



Esteban happily flew off to do the sandman's job

The next morning there was an awful uproar when children who had lost their teeth found nothing under their pillows while their brothers and sisters found nickels under theirs. You can imagine how much trouble this caused.

Another time Esteban was loaned out to Santa Claus to help make balloons for Christmas. He worked for six months and by Christmas he had made over 1000 balloons. On Christmas Eve he blew them up and tied them together and took them out to put in Santa's sleigh.

Half way to the sleigh he stopped to throw a snowball. He put the balloons on the ground so that he could get his gloves out of his pocket. But hardly had he put the balloons down when the wind swept them up and away into the sky

There was not a single balloon in a single Christmas stocking that year!

That's the way things always seemed to happen to Esteban and the Queen Fairy was very upset about it. She called Esteban to her and said, "What in the world can I do with you?"

Esteban said, "Give me a big job, a really important job, and you will see what I can do."

"Very well," answered the Queen. "I'll give you one more chance. But I warn you, if you fall down on this job it will be the end."

"Oh, I won't fail!" vowed Esteban. "Just tell me what it is."

"The Sandman has the sniffles," said the Queen. "I will give you his job to do tonight. Now remember you must work quickly to complete your rounds, for any child you do not visit will not sleep tonight."

"Don't worry," said Esteban eagerly. "I am leaving this very moment."

Quickly he filled a bag with sand so fine and soft you could not feel it between your fingers. Then he threw the bag over his shoulder and flew away with it to sprinkle the sand in the eyes of all the world's children and put them to sleep for the night.

But the very first child he visited did not want to go to sleep. He was lying in bed reading a favorite book.

"Come now," said Esteban. "Just a speck of sand and asleep you will go."

"But this is such a good book!" protested the child.

“Never mind that,” said Esteban. “It’s time to go to sleep.”

“Please let me read a teeny bit further,” begged the child.

“It can wait until tomorrow,” said Esteban firmly.

“Just one more line,” implored the child.

“What is this book anyway?” cried Esteban. He leaned over the child’s shoulder to see. It was a big, big book with wonderful pictures of pirates and shipwrecks and one-eyed men.

“What a book!” exclaimed Esteban. “What’s it about?”

“Listen,” said the child eagerly and he began to read. Esteban snuggled down beside him and in two seconds he had forgotten all about the Sandman’s job.

## Chapter 2

### ESTEBAN GOOFS AGAIN

Page after page the boy read while Esteban lay on the pillow and looked at the pictures and thrilled to the tale.

When the story was ended Esteban raised his head. "What a story!" he exclaimed. Then his eyes filled with alarm and he sprang to his feet.

"Look," he cried, "It's morning!"

Sure enough, while the boy had read the night had passed away. And children all over the world were happy because they had not closed their eyes that night. But their mothers did not like it.

The Queen Fairy called Esteban to her and said, "Now this is the end, the very end. You are just too careless. I really do not see how we can keep you in Fairyland any longer."

Esteban hung his head. He felt very sad. He didn't know what he would do if he had to leave Fairyland.

But it happened that Santa Claus was visiting the Queen Fairy that week and when he saw how sad Esteban was Santa said to the Queen, "Why not give him one more chance?"

The Queen said, "Well, the Sandman is still sick and there really isn't anyone else I can spare so maybe Esteban can . . ."

"Oh, yes!" cried Esteban. "I'll do it right this time - you'll see!"

And he ran away and began preparing his sand for the night. He threw away all the sand he had not used the night before and filled the bag with sand twice as soft and fine as he had had before.

He filled the bag very full and carried it down and put it at the bottom of a hill so it would be ready for him that night.

After dinner he dressed in his very best clothes and, as he stood in front of the mirror combing his hair, he promised himself that he would do nothing foolish this night.

He felt so good as he started out after the bag of sand that he started to run, and as he ran he sang.

Down the hill he went, pell-mell, suddenly he tripped in the darkness and shot head first to the bottom of the hill, landing with his face buried in his own bag of sand.

In two seconds the sand had put him sound asleep and there was no one making the Sandman's rounds that night.

The next morning the Queen Fairy called Esteban before a meeting of all the elves and fairies and sprites of Fairyland.

"I am sorry, Esteban," said the Queen sadly, "but I warned you and now you cannot stay in Fairyland any longer."

"Couldn't I have one more . . ." began Esteban.

The Queen shook her head. "No more chances, Esteban. But if you prove yourself brave and true and dependable in the world then come back and we shall see."

Then she leaned forward, but before she could touch Esteban Santa Claus said, "Wait!" He had been standing there with the



**"Why not give him one more chance?" said Santa to the queen**

other elves watching and now he came up and put something in Esteban's hands.

It was a little bird with pale blue wings.

"Take this bird for company," said Santa, "If you ever need me tell the bird. He will know where to find me."

"Thank you," said Esteban, taking the bird. "But I won't need any help and I'll be back. Just wait and see."

Then the Queen Fairy leaned forward and gently took the wings from Esteban's shoulders and Esteban began to grow and grow and grow until presently he was just a freckle-faced boy and not an elf any more.

Chapter 3  
SHOESHINE BOY

Esteban looked around in astonishment. The Queen Fairy and Santa Claus and all the Fairyland folk had vanished.

He looked down at his big feet and long legs.

"I'm a giant!" he exclaimed.

He wasn't a giant, of course. In fact, he was a very small boy. But if you've been an elf all your life and you suddenly turn into a boy, you feel like a giant.

He reached over his shoulders to see if his elf wings were really gone.

"Why here they are!" he cried. "I still have my wings."

But it wasn't his wings that he felt at all. It was the wings of the little blue bird Santa had given him. Esteban lifted the bird from his shoulders and put her inside his shirt.

"Take good care of wings," he whispered. "We may need them before I get mine back."

Then he sighed and began his journey away from Fairyland.



**"Try to deliver these slippers." said the old cobbler**

For a long time, he walked until at last he came to a town. In the window of a cobbler's shop he saw a sign that said:

"Wanted: Shoeshine Boy."

Esteban went into the shop. An old shoemaker was sitting at a bench repairing shoes.

"I'd like to be your shoeshine boy," said Esteban.

The old shoemaker looked Esteban up and down. "You're pretty small," he said finally. "Do you think you can shine all these shoes?"

Esteban looked in the corner where there was a great hill of shoes waiting to be shined.

"Oh, yes," he said cheerfully. "Watch and see"

And he sat down immediately and began to polish the shoes. But he had never before polished shoes and it was dark in the corner and the very first thing he did was take a pair of black shoes and give them a splendid shine with brown polish.

When the shoemaker saw this he cried out, "What a careless boy you are! You can't shine shoes!"

Esteban said, "If I can't shine shoes perhaps I can do something else. Let me be your errand boy."

"Very well," said the cobbler. "Take this dollar to the factory and get some shoestring."

Esteban put the dollar in his pocket and rushed away. But it was Christmas time and the streets were filled with wonderful Christmas decorations. Esteban stopped a hundred times to see a hundred marvelous things. When he finally got to the factory he reached in his pocket for the dollar to pay for the string and the pocket was empty. He had lost the money on the way.

He went back empty handed to the cobbler and the cobbler said furiously, "Go away I'm through with you!"

Esteban sat on a bench and began to cry.

"Oh, stop sniffing," said the cobbler pityingly. "Here, see if you can deliver these slippers. They were sent for repair from the castle on the hill. No one has called for them and you may as well deliver them."

Esteban snatched the slippers eagerly and rushed into the street. He pulled a slipper on each hand like a glove. Suddenly he stopped.

There was something in one of the slippers. He pulled out a lightly folded slip of paper. He opened it and read:

"If you believe in fairies, help me before it is too late!"

Esteban exclaimed in astonishment and ran all the way back to the cobbler's shop.

Chapter 4  
THE CASTLE

“What?” cried the cobbler when Esteban burst into the shop. “Could you not even deliver the slippers to the castle on the hill?”

“Look!” cried Esteban. “Look at what I found in the shoe!”

He held out the slip of paper. The cobbler put on his reading glasses and peered at the note. “If you believe in fairies, help me before it is too late!” he read.

Then he shook his head angrily. “What is this nonsense?”

“It was in the shoe,” said Esteban. “A message in the shoe!”

The cobbler took the red velvet slipper embroidered with gold. “My boy,” he said sadly, “I am an old man and you have bothered me all day long. Please go away now and never come here again.”

“But the message?” gasped Esteban. “What . . .”

“When I repaired these shoes,” said the cobbler, tearing up the slip of paper, “I found no message there.”

“It was in the toe. You couldn’t have felt it,” cried Esteban. “What shall we do?”

“Do nothing,” snapped the cobbler.

“Don’t you believe in fairies?” cried Esteban.

“Stop bothering me!” shouted the cobbler. And with that he pushed Esteban into the street and slammed the door.

“What can it mean?” wondered Esteban. “A child sent the note, for the slippers were small and narrow and scarcely fit on my hands.”

The little blue bird stirred inside Esteban’s shirt and the boy thought, “should I send the bird for Santa? But suppose it is all a joke. They’d call me a fool. I must find out what it is myself.”

He went straight to a peanut vendor on the street corner. He said, “Can you tell me where to find the castle on the hill?”

“Certainly,” said the peanut vendor. “That’s Professor Szpilki’s castle. Look yonder, you can see the windows even from here.”

Esteban looked where the peddler pointed and there stood a great white castle surrounded by a great white wall. While Esteban looked, the sun sinking in the west was reflected in the windows and they turned red as though the castle had burst into flames.

“That’s a scary looking place,” said Esteban with a shiver.

“It is indeed,” said the peddler. “They say that Professor Szpilki is out of his head since the loss of his wife. You take my advice and stay away from there.”

But when the peddler had gone Esteban turned and went straight toward the castle. By the time he reached the bottom of the hill it was night and all he could see of the castle was a single lighted window.

Although the night had been calm there now came a mighty wind and a downpour of freezing rain.

Esteban pulled his coat tight to protect the blue bird. He struggled against the wind towards the single light at the top of the hill.

Suddenly there was a flash of lightning and the whole castle stood clear and bright with the door right in front of Esteban. He threw himself against the door and pounded with his fists.

For a long time there was no answer and then there was an awful crash. The one light in the castle went out, and the door slowly opened.



**Esteban furiously pounded against the castle doors**

## Chapter 5

### THE STRANGE PROFESSOR

Esteban stood petrified by the awful crash and the sudden darkness in the castle. The door opened slowly and a voice from the blackness said:

“Come in, please.”

Esteban tried to move but his legs wouldn't work. He wished he could run away,

Suddenly a hand came out of the darkness and grasped his arm.

“Come in, whoever you are. Don't stand there in the rain.”

“T-that crash!” stammered Esteban. “W-what was that?”

“Oh,” said the voice, “that was thunder. And the storm has put out the light. Come in the hall and I will light candles.”

His heart still pounding, Esteban followed the voice inside and the door slammed shut behind him. An instant later a candle was lighted and Esteban found himself looking into the kind, sad eyes of a handsome man.

“There now! Feel better?” asked the man

“Much better,” nodded Esteban with relief.

“I am Professor Szpilki. Who are you?”

Esteban started to say he was an elf, or used to be an elf, but then he thought perhaps he better not mention that. So he said, “I am a shoeshine boy and I found a note in a shoe that came from here.”

The professor turned away and lighted more candles. “And what did the note say?” he asked.



“Charlotte,” asked the professor,  
“did you send for help?”

As the hall grew brighter Esteban felt safer. He began to feel silly at repeating such a message. But he said, “Well, the note asked for help.”

Professor Szpilki looked startled. “What an odd message,” he exclaimed. “But my little girl and I live here alone and the note could not have come from here.”

Esteban looked around the great hall. It was beautiful and peaceful.

He turned to the professor. “Has your little girl a pair of red velvet slippers embroidered in gold?”

“Why, yes,” said Professor Szpilki. “She insisted I send them for repair though they didn't really need it. That was weeks ago. I must call for them.”

“They're the ones, then,” exclaimed Esteban. “That's where I found the note.”

“Nonsense! I'll call my daughter.”

He pulled a cord and a bell rang far overhead. A few moments later a curly-haired girl ran down the great stairs.

“Charlotte,” said the professor sternly, “This boy says he found a note in your slipper calling for help. Do you know anything about such a note?”

Charlotte's eyes widened.

“Well?” said the professor. “Do you?”

“N-no,” whispered the child.

“There!” cried her father turning to Esteban. “You see?”

“I'm sorry I bothered you,” mumbled Esteban opening the door. And he thought, “What a fool I have been!”

“Good-by.” he said from the steps and he turned to wave.

Then his mouth fell open because suddenly he saw a look of fear in the child's eyes and her lips formed the silent words, “Come back! Come back!”

As Esteban stared in astonishment, the professor said cheerily, “Good-by, my boy,” and the door was firmly closed.

Chapter 6  
A TERRIBLE TALE



**Esteban pulled himself hand over hand  
up the castle wall**

When the castle door shut Esteban didn't know what to do. Did the professor's little girl really want him to come back? Or was it all just his imagination?

"How could she be afraid of her father?" he asked himself. "He is so pleasant and kind. I must stop being such a fool or the Queen Fairy will never give me back my wings and I shall never be an elf again."

But halfway down the hill he remembered again the terror in Charlotte's eyes.

"It's no use," he moaned. "I cannot go away until I see her again."

He turned back. The wind howled and sent shivers down his back. He stood in the storm watching the castle until the lights disappeared downstairs and then shone again, one in a second floor window and one in a third floor window.

"Which window is hers?" wondered Esteban.

By and by both lights went out and still Esteban could not decide which room belonged to Charlotte. Finally he pulled the little blue bird from his shirt and said, "Blue bird, blue bird, fly, if you can, to the right window."

The blue bird fluttered her wings in the rain and flew away. Esteban could see nothing but presently he heard above the wind the sound of the bird pecking at a window.

Suddenly the light appeared again on the third floor. The window was thrown open and Charlotte's head appeared. Esteban rushed forward and grasping the vines of ivy which covered the castle he pulled himself up hand over hand until he reached the girl's room.

The little blue bird followed him into the room and Esteban put her back inside his shirt.

Charlotte was crying. "If you hadn't come back I don't know what I would have done. There's so little time left and it's almost Christmas and just think, if . . ."

"Walt!" cried Esteban. "You're going much too fast for me. First of all - did you write the note I found in the slipper?"

Charlotte clasped her hands. "Oh yes! And you, you do believe in fairies, don't you?"

"I should say so!" exclaimed Esteban. "You see, I'm an elf really. I mean I was." And he told her the story of how he had lost his wings.

"Then you'll understand how awful this is," cried Charlotte. "There has been absolutely no one I could turn to because so many people don't believe in fairies or don't care, or think I'm just out of my head and, oh, I just don't know what we can do!"

Esteban threw himself in a chair. "Begin at the beginning and tell me the whole story."

"I'm telling you!" cried Charlotte. "My father is going to get rid of every fairy on earth!"

Esteban leaped to his feet. "What?"

"My father has made a powerful gas. He is going to release it on Christmas day and destroy all fairies. That means there will be no more Santa Claus or tooth fairies or goblins or witches or Queen Fairy or,

"Or maybe even me!" cried Esteban in horror.

## Chapter 7

### THE SLEEPING WOMAN

“But, why?” asked Esteban, “Why should your father want to destroy all fairies?”

Charlotte took the candle from her bed table. “Follow me,” she whispered.

Softly she opened the door. Esteban, hardly daring to breathe, tiptoed behind her. Suddenly he stopped in terror, certain he saw Professor Szpilki stealing after them. But it was only himself shadowed on the wall.

Down the endless corridor and up three flights of stairs they went until at last they came to a gilded door. Charlotte opened the door and led Esteban into a large white bedroom.

In the center of the room was an enormous white bed and in the bed lay the most beautiful woman Esteban had ever seen.

“W-who is she?” he gasped.

“My mother” said Charlotte.

Tears came into her eyes. “She will never wake again.”

“But why not?” cried Esteban.

“She was put under a spell by the Hangdog Hag.”

“The Hangdog Hag! Why, that’s the witch of Hangdog who despises all beautiful women!”

Charlotte nodded. “My mother was the most beautiful woman in the whole world. The Hangdog Hag came one night and put her to sleep and said she would never wake up. Then the Hag vanished and has never been seen again.”

“How awful!” cried Esteban.

“When my father saw what happened, he swore he would find the Hag and put an end to her. But though he searched and searched he never could find her. Finally he shut himself up in his laboratory and worked for weeks and weeks until he had made a mysterious gas. It is so powerful it will spread instantly over the earth and suffocate the Hangdog Hag wherever she is.

“That’s good!” exclaimed Esteban.

“But don’t you see?” protested Charlotte. “It will destroy not just the Hag but all fairy folk everywhere!”

Esteban thought of the queen fairy and Santa Claus and the tooth fairies and the Sandman and all his other dear friends.

“They can’t die!” he cried “What would everyone do without them? What would it be like for the world if there were no Santa?”

“I know, I know!” wept Charlotte. “What shall we do?”

“There’s only one thing to do,” said Esteban. “We must get that bottle of gas! Where does he keep it?”

“On a table in his workroom. I saw it there only last night when he came out of the room as I was passing.”

“Well get it,” said Esteban.



**The weeping Charlotte told of the Hangdog Hag’s curse**

He took Charlotte’s hand and turned from the bed. Then his heart dropped and he fell back horror for the professor himself stood in the door

The professor shook his head sadly. “Ah, my boy, you should never have come back for I have heard all you said and now I must imprison you and Charlotte until my task is done’

Charlotte threw herself on him. “No, no father! Don’t do it, please!”

“I must,” said the professor gravely. “You and the boy will get in my way and nothing must stop me from setting loose my gas on Christmas day.”



## Chapter 8

### POOR BLUE BIRD

The professor led Charlotte and Esteban into the room next to that of his sleeping wife. They could see it was a large and well furnished room. But the windows were barred.

“I will bring your meals and see that you are comfortable,” said the professor kindly. “But you cannot get out until Christmas day when I have destroyed the Hangdog Hag.”

“But, father!” begged Charlotte. “What good will it do? Destroying the Hag will not bring mother back again!”

“Perhaps not,” said the professor. “But it will keep the hag from casting a spell over anyone else.”

“B-but, sir,” protested Esteban. “Must you destroy all Fairyland, too?”

The professor nodded unhappily. “Yes, if that is the only way I can reach the Hag.”

Then he went out and bolted the door.

Through the long night the children huddled together until near morning they fell into a restless sleep.

When they woke, the sun was streaming into the room. Esteban ran to the windows and pushed at the bars but he could not budge them.

“It’s useless,” cried Charlotte.

Esteban turned from the window. His eyes sparkled with new hope. “Santa Claus could help us!”

“How would he ever know?” moaned Charlotte.

“My bird!” cried Esteban joyfully. “She’ll go to Santa!” He took the little bluebird from his shirt. “Santa himself gave her

to me and told me to send her if I ever needed help.” He put his lips close to the bird and whispered excitedly.

“Fly to Santa Land, little blue bird. Fly for help!”

He reached his hands through the bars of the window and released the bird. She spread her wings and gently glided down towards the great stone wall surrounding the castle.

Esteban watched eagerly through the bars. “Now everything will be all right!” he cried.

But even as he spoke an awful thing happened. A great hawk, perched atop the castle, saw the little blue bird and, shrieking fiercely, swept down after her. The blue bird saw the hawk coming and changed her course. The hawk followed. The blue bird flew faster and faster. So did the hawk.

“Faster, faster!” screamed Esteban.

But it was no use. As the children watched the hawk overtook the bluebird, fastened its huge talons around her and brought her back to its nest on top the castle.

Charlotte burst into tears. Esteban put his arms around her.

“Don’t worry. I’ll think of something,” he comforted her.

For two days he thought. On the third day he had his plan. He put Charlotte in her bed and piled all the covers on her and told her what she must do. At noon the professor brought in their dinner.

“Oh, sir,” said Esteban. “Charlotte has a terrible chill. See she can’t stop shaking!”

The professor turned to his daughter. Under the covers she was shaking and quivering with such violence that even the floor beneath the bed creaked and rattled.

“Good heavens!” cried the professor. “I’ll get hot water bottles!”

White-faced, he rushed away so quickly that he failed to bolt the door behind him.

“It worked!” cried Esteban to Charlotte. And he ran from the room.



“Fly to Santa Land, little blue bird. Fly for help!”

## Chapter 9

### THROUGH THE TRAP DOOR

As soon as Esteban escaped from the room he found himself lost in the endless corridors of the castle.

“I must find the professor’s work room.” he thought frantically. “But where?”

As he crept down the stairs he heard steps running up them. It was Professor Szpilki carrying five hot water bottles for Charlotte.

Esteban hurried back the way he had come. There was a sofa in the corridor. He threw himself on it and covered himself with pillows.

A moment later the professor hurried by. When he had turned the corner Esteban leaped up and again dashed down the stairs. He rushed from room to room, from floor to floor, searching for the work room. There was no sign of it.

At last he came to the ground floor and a door that would not open. He knew this was the room. Far above, he heard a door bang and running steps and he knew the professor had discovered the trick.

Esteban ran through the great hall to the front door and out of the castle. Free at last, he was tempted to keep right on running out of the castle grounds.

Instead he stumbled through the shrubbery to the windows of the workroom. He put his face against the glass and there on a table he saw, at last, the clear glass bottle he was searching for.

It held the gas that would destroy Fairyland.

Snatching up a rock Esteban smashed it against the window. He scrambled into the room. Snatching the bottle from the table he ran back to the window.

But suddenly there was a grinding noise and an iron screen slid down the wall and blocked the window.

“What’s that?” cried Esteban falling back.

“That,” said Professor Szpilki at the door, “is one of my inventions to protect my work room. You see, I had only to press this button to screen the window. Come now, give me the bottle.”

Slowly the professor moved across the room towards the boy. With every step the professor took towards him, Esteban took one away. Three times they circled the room until finally the professor stood still. Suddenly he leaned down and yanked at the rug on which the boy stood.

Taken by surprise, Esteban fell backwards and the professor grabbed him.

“See how easily I have taken you.” smiled the professor.

But he had not taken him after all for Esteban kicked and squirmed and broke away still clutching the bottle.

“How foolish you are,” said the professor “The bottle in your hands almost broke. Should it break, the gas will escape now

instead of later as I plan. Then what would you have accomplished?”

Esteban stood on the other of the table gasping for breath. “Suppose it does break!” he thought with horror. “Instead of saving all my friends I will be the one who destroys them. Oh, shall I do?”

The professor came to the other side of the table. He put his finger on a button.

“I shall count three,” he said. “If by then you have not given me the bottle I shall cause you to fall and break the bottle.”

He sighed and begun to count. “One!”

Esteban’s legs shook. His mouth went dry.

“Two!”

Esteban’s heart seemed to stand still.

“Three!”

The professor pushed the button and a trap door beneath Esteban sprang open, dropping him through the floor.

But at the very instant he fell, he thought, “I must save the bottle” Just as he disappeared he threw the bottle up into the waiting hands of the professor.



“Come now,” said the Professor,  
“give me the bottle.”

## Chapter 10

### THE MOLE HOLE

Down, down, down went Esteban in a hole that seemed to have no bottom. Faster and faster he went. He thought that when he landed he would surely be crushed.

Suddenly he did land - right on his head! But he wasn't even hurt. For he landed on a bed.

It was a teeny bed with fat, white pillows and a bright red blanket. On a table by the bed stood a tiny lamp glowing brightly

There was a tiny rocking chair nearby and a wash stand with a tiny wash bowl on it.

On a shelf there were some tiny books. Esteban picked up one of the books. It was called "Digging for Fun."

Esteban shook his head in puzzlement. Could he possibly have gone right through the earth and landed on the other side of the world? But why would people there live in such small houses?



**Down, down Esteban fell into a strange weeny room**

Just then he heard a scraping noise. The scraping grew louder until finally there was a great big thump and a hole was punched right through the wall.

Through the hole bounced a fat little mole with a top hat on his head and a brief case in his paw. Great furry eyebrows hung over his tiny eyes and he wore glasses that were two inches thick.

He peered at Esteban in astonishment. "Gracious! I didn't expect guests!"

Hastily he took off his hat and began to bustle around the room, straightening the bed and dusting the books.

"Just a minute and we'll be cleaned up here. I'm sorry I wasn't here when you arrived, but I only moved in a few days ago and I've been terribly busy on the new roads, you know. Or perhaps you didn't know. Well, anyway, I'm home now and very glad to see you."

At this he stopped chattering and peered at Esteban through his two inch glasses. "By the way, who are you anyway?"

Esteban took a big breath. "I'm an elf." he began.

"Good gracious!" said the mole. "You're awfully big for elf. I don't suppose I've ever seen such a big elf."

"Well," explained Esteban. "I'm not an elf anymore. You see, I was an elf but I did everything wrong and made trouble for everyone so the Queen Fairy took away my wings and I'm a boy now. But I'm going to be an elf again if I'm a good boy."

The mole shook his head in wonder at such a story. "But, tell me," he asked, "How did you get into my bedroom?"

"The professor tricked me!" cried Esteban. "Now he has the bottle and I'll never be able to get it again!"

The mole took off his glasses and wearily rubbed his eyes. "I wish you'd just start at the beginning and tell me the whole story," he begged.

So Esteban told how Charlotte's mother had been put under a spell by the Hangdog Hag and could never wake again. How Charlotte's father, in order to destroy the witch, had made a gas that would kill not only the Hag but all fairies and elves in the world.

"And I must get to Santa Claus for help," finished Esteban. "But how will I ever get there?"

The fat little mole sat in his rocking chair and rocked busily.

By and by, he smiled happily and bounced from the chair.

"The Snuke!" he cried.

"What?" said Esteban.

"The Snuke," said the mole. "The Snuke will get you there!"

## Chapter 11

### A TRIP UNDERGROUND

“Don’t you agree,” asked the mole, “that the Snuke can get you to Santa Land?”

“Pardon me” faltered Esteban, “but I never heard of the Snuke.”

“Good gracious! Don’t ever let him hear you didn’t know who he was. He is very sensitive.”

“Yes, sir,” said Esteban. “But who is he?”

“He is my cousin. He lives in the sea instead of on land and where I dig through earth he digs through ice. So you see he is the very one who can get through all that ice in Santa Land.”

“Wonderful!” cried Esteban. Then his face fell. “But, how will I find the Snuke?”

“That’s easy,” replied the mole. “I will take you to him. We have wonderful roads. I’m a road engineer, you know, and my brothers and I have built fine roads that circle under this whole land.

“Come with me now. We’ll take this short cut I just made from the main road.”

With that he snatched up his brief case, put on his top hat and disappeared through the hole in the wall. Esteban stared at the hole in dismay. Squeezing himself as small as he could he would never be able to get through.

After a moment the mole reappeared. “Come on!” He beckoned impatiently.

“B-but I’m too big!” stammered Esteban.

The mole clicked his tongue in exasperation. “Tch, tch! I forgot about that. Well, never mind. I’ll get help and we’ll make the roads larger.”

He disappeared and presently Esteban heard the familiar scraping sound. But this time it sounded as though a whole army was scraping.

Suddenly the whole side of the room did break open and the mole bounced in and said, “Bring the lamp and come along.”

Esteban snatched the tiny lamp from the table and crawled into the large hole. Ahead of him he could see a thousand moles digging furiously to enlarge the tiny roads.

They worked so fast it was all Esteban could do to keep up with them. Lying on his stomach he held the lantern in one hand and pushed himself along with the other.

Presently the moles stopped their work.

“Are we there?” asked Esteban eagerly.

“Gracious, no!” said his friend. “We are stopping to eat. Moles eat an enormous lot, you know. We have to in order to keep up our strength. Here, have a snack.”

He opened his brief case and took out a triple-decker caterpillar sandwich. When Esteban refused the mole gobbled up the sandwich himself while up ahead the other moles lunched.

When the meal was over the work began anew. Three more times the moles stopped to eat, but when they stopped the fourth time the fat little mole said, “Here we are, we have reached the sea.”

Now the moles tunneled upward until they broke through the surface and daylight flooded the hole.

The little fat mole popped out of the hole with Esteban behind him. They found themselves on the edge of a vast sea and lying on the beach was the strangest looking creature ever seen on land or sea.

“What-what is that?” cried Esteban.

“A Snuke,” replied the mole. “That is my cousin, the Snuke.”



**“I will take you to the Snuke,” said the friendly mole**

Chapter 12  
A QUEER RIDE

The Snuke is the queerest fish in the sea. He has a small round body. At one end is a fan-like tail.

At the other end is an enormous mouth three feet long. The top of its snout has notches sharp as the teeth of a saw.

It was the creature that Esteban and the mole found snoozing on the beach.

“Wake up, old fish,” cried the mole.

“Wh-wh-what?” stammered the Snuke, blinking his eyes sleepily.

“What a lazy life you Snukes lead,” jeered the mole. “While we moles work day and night you do nothing but lie on the beach and sleep.”

“What else is there to do?” yawned the Snuke.

“We have something you can do!” said the mole. “Tell him, boy.”

So Esteban told the story again of how all Fairyland was in peril and he must get to Santa Land to warn Santa.

The Snuke listened to the story with growing horror. “Oh, my!” he exclaimed. “Some of my very best friends are sea fairies. Oh, my! What shall we do?”

“Do?” snapped the mole. “Take the boy to Santa Land. That’s what the saw on your snout is for, isn’t it - to cut through ice?”

“O - of course! But how could I carry the boy?”

“In your mouth, silly!” retorted the mole.

The Snuke’s great mouth dropped open with surprise. Before he could close it again the mole pushed Esteban in and snapped the jaws shut.

It was cold and dark and wet inside the Snuke’s mouth. Esteban crouched there and shivered. He had never been so uncomfortable.

But the worse was yet to come for suddenly the Snuke rocked back and forth, took several somersaults, and finally began to roll up and down.

“We are at sea!” thought Esteban.

He held tight to the Snuke’s teeth and tried to rock and roll with the fish like a man on a ship.

When he became used to the rolling it was quite pleasant and he was just beginning to enjoy the trip when a most awful noise deafened him. It was the sound of a screaming saw.

They had reached the polar Ice and the Snuke was cutting through it with the saw on top of his snout. Esteban put both hands over his ears, but he could not shut out the sound.

Just when he thought he could stand it no longer the sawing and rocking stopped and the Snuke’s mouth opened. Peering out, Esteban saw a great snowy land and tucked between two white hills was a little red house with smoke curling from its chimney.

“It’s Santa Land!” cried Esteban joyfully.

He leaped out of the Snuke’s mouth and raced away. But when he had gone only a little way he remembered the Snuke. He ran back.

“Thank you for the ride!” he exclaimed to the fish whose big mouth was sticking out of a hole in the ice.

“Thank you!” replied the Snuke. “Remember It’s my friends you’re trying to save!”

Esteban turned and dashed away. He ran as fast as he could towards the little red house shouting “Santa! Santa!” at the top of his lungs.



## Chapter 13

### SEARCH FOR THE HAG

Santa stared at the boy who came running toward him across the snow.

"It's Esteban!" he exclaimed. "The elf who lost his wings! What has happened? You look frightened half to death!"

"Oh, I am." gasped Esteban. "I have terrible news. There is hardly any time left and there is a man who is going to destroy all fairies on Christmas day!"

Then Esteban told Santa the whole story of the Hangdog Hag's spell and the professor's plan to destroy them all.

"How awful!" cried Santa.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he murmured, puffing distractedly on his pipe. Suddenly he turned away. "Come, there is not time to lose!"

"Where are we going?"

"To the home of the Hangdog Hag," said Santa. "We must persuade her to break the spell over the professor's wife."

He strode away with Esteban at his heels. "Hitch up the sleigh!" he ordered when they arrived at the stables.

"What are you thinking of?" cried Patrick Tweedleknees, who was the oldest dwarf in Santa Land and who this year was in charge of the reindeer. "The deer mustn't go out now. They must rest to be ready for Christmas!"

"If I don't take them out now there won't be any Christmas," replied Santa. And he himself began harnessing the deer while Tweedleknees wrung his hands.

A few minutes later Santa and Esteban were flying through the sky headed for the home of the Hangdog Hag. They arrived, at last, on the very tip-top of a far-away mountain where a one room shack stood silent and alone.

But alas! When they opened the door they found the shack empty.

"She's been long gone," groaned Santa. "And it looks as though she doesn't plan to return."

It was true. Every piece of furniture had been smashed. The windows were broken and even the brooms were lying in shreds.

Heavy-hearted, Santa and Esteban returned to the sleigh and made the sad trip back to Santa Land. There, Tweedleknees glared at them furiously as he unharnessed the deer.

But Santa ignored his bad humor. "Send a message to the Queen Fairy," he ordered. "Tell her to come at once. Send the same message to all the fairy folk you can reach."

Tweedleknees' mouth fell open. He understood, at last, that there was trouble - big trouble - for only once in a hundred years did Santa send such a message to fairy folk.

Tweedleknees rushed away to send out the alarm in Fairyland's own secret language.

Within a few hours there arrived at Santa's door an army of goblins and imps and witches and elves. Santa told them the story of the great peril and the little folk listened and trembled.

"What shall we do?" they whispered.

"We must find the Hangdog Hag," said Santa. "That is why I have called you here. Who has seen the Hag or heard of her or knows where she can be?"

"I saw her lately crossing the moors to the land where witches live," said a weeping will-o'-the-wisp.

"I carried her across the witches river," exclaimed a tiny elf boatman.

"She's with you then!" exclaimed Santa turning to the witches.

But the witches sadly shook their heads and the oldest, crookedest witch stepped forward and croaked, "She's gone."

"Gone where?" cried Santa.

"To the moon." whispered the witch in a cracking voice.



**Santa told the people of Fairyland  
about the great peril**

## Chapter 14

### THE MAN IN THE MOON

“The Hangdog Hag has gone to the moon!” cried Santa.

All the fairy folk moaned. Well they knew that if the Hag had fled to the moon they could never reach her. The spell she had cast over the professor’s wife could not be broken and the professor would release the awful gas that would destroy them all.

A little pigwidgeon burst into tears. The wraiths were bowed with grief. The leprechauns hugged one another in fear and even the ghosts turned whiter.

Then Esteban tugged at Santa’s sleeve. “I could go to the moon,” he whispered.

“How?” asked Santa,

“In your sleigh,” said Esteban. “Your reindeer could take me there.”

Santa turned to Patrick Tweedleknees. “Is it true?” he asked the keeper of the deer. “Could the deer get to the moon?”

Tweedleknees nodded unhappily. He hated to tire the deer with Christmas so near but he knew that Christmas itself depended on the trip to the moon. So he said, “The deer are ready. They can go anywhere.”

“Then,” said Santa, “I will go.”

“No, no.” protested Tweedleknees. “You must stay here. There is a mountain of work to be done and if the mission succeeds and there is to be a Christmas we must be ready for it.”

“It will succeed!” promised Esteban.

All the fairy folk agreed that Santa could not be spared and that since Esteban had already done so much he should have the honor of going.

So once again the reindeer were put into harness and, with Esteban in the sleigh, took off into the sky.

Faster than the wind they went, straight into the heavens. In a few hours they had left the earth far behind and were flying among the stars.

Sometimes it was very hot. Other times it was colder than Santa Land had ever been.

On and on and on they went until they reached the highest sky. Here they lost all sense of weight and though the deer sped on it was as if they were floating upward with no effort at all. Esteban had to hold tight to the sleigh or he would have floated off by himself.

Now the moon came closer and closer and instead of going upward it seemed to Esteban that they were gently floating down.

But when they landed at last the moon was not the beautiful silver ball Esteban had seen from afar. It was gray and barren and desolate with not a sign of life anywhere - not even a blade of grass.



**“Fi! Fi! Fi!” cried the man in the moon**

Esteban stared at the treeless mountains that towered around him. He was frightened and more lonely than he had ever been in his life.

“How shall I find the Hag?” he wondered.

At that moment he heard a shout and turning he saw an old, old, man hobbling out of the hills.

“Fi! Fi! Fi!” shouted the man, waving a stick.

Esteban turned pale and his knees shook. He wanted to run away but there was no place for him to run to.

The old man arrived out of breath.

“Fi!” he gasped and smiled. The smile spread across his whole face and suddenly Esteban understood that instead of “Fi” the old man meant to say “Hi!”

“Hi!” cried Esteban smiling, too. “Who are you?”

“I?” said the old, old man raising his eyebrows in surprise. “I the Man in the Moon.”

## Chapter 15

### THE HANDOG HAG

“The Man in the Moon!” tried Esteban. “I never really believed there was such a one!”

“Ah, yes.” said the old, old man, stroking his long white beard, “I’ve lived here for over 1000 years. I have often been lonely for there is no other soul who lives on the moon save me. But here is a funny thing! I have never had a visitor until recently and now you are the second one to come!”

“W-who was the other one?” asked Esteban eagerly.

“A beautiful woman,” said the old man dreamily. “My very breath was taken away when I saw her and I could find no words to speak. Then it was too late for she hid herself in yonder cave and will not come out.”

All is lost, thought Esteban in despair. This creature cannot be the Hangdog Hag for she is ugly beyond belief.



**The Hangdog Hag peered at Esteban from the moon-cave**

The Man in the Moon held up the staff he leaned on. “But I have this!” he said happily. “It is the stick she arrived on.”

Esteban’s heart leaped with joy. The stick was a broom with all the straws broken off and he knew it was the kind of a broom that hags and witches ride. Then he understood that, since the old man had not seen a woman in 1000 years, even the hag looked beautiful to him.

“Take me to the cave where she hides!” he cried.

The old man gladly led Esteban to a cave in the hills.

“Old hag, come out” shouted Esteban. “I have come all the way from the earth to have words with you.”

Almost instantly the burning coal eyes of the Hangdog Hag peered from the cave. Snakes of hair encircled her head and fell to her scrawny, hunched shoulders,

“A-are you really from the earth?” she quavered.

“I have flown here in Santa’s sleigh just to see you,” said Esteban. “For you placed a spell on the wife of Professor Szpilki so that she could never wake again,”

The Hag nodded. “She was so beautiful,” she muttered with trembling lips. “And I am so ugly.”

“The professor is broken-hearted. He has made a gas that he will release on Christmas day. It will destroy you and every fairy creature on the earth.”

The Hag cackled. “It will not destroy me. I am no longer on the earth.”

“True. But your brothers and sisters and aunts and nephews - think of them! Oh, do break the spell and save Fairyland on earth!”

The Hag’s long crooked teeth chewed on her lip. At last she said, “If I give you a powder that will break the spell will you take me back to earth with you in Santa’s sleigh?”

Esteban’s eyes grew wide with surprise.

“When I landed here,” said the Hag, “my broom straws broke off my broom and I can never return to earth unless I go with you. “

“Of course you can come with me!” cried Esteban, “Only give me the powder and we’ll leave at once!”

The old Hag fumbled in the folds of her black dress and drew forth a round tin box.

“Only cast a pinch of this powder on the eyes of the sleeping woman,” she muttered, “and the woman will waken.”

Esteban put the box in his pocket. “We must hurry,” he said. “There is so little time left.”

But as he and the Hag started away the Man in the Moon blocked their path.

“I am so sorry,” he said. “I cannot let you go.”



## Chapter 16

### A STRANGE PROPOSAL

"I am sorry," said the Man in the Moon as he blocked Esteban's path. "I cannot let you go."

Esteban fell back in alarm. "What?" he cried. "Why would you hold us here?"

The old man smiled gently. "I will not keep you long," he said sadly. "Only long enough for me to feast my eyes once more on this beautiful vision." He peered with adoring eyes at the Hangdog Hag.

"Me?" cackled the Hag in astonishment. "You mean I am beautiful?"

"To me, you are lovely," said the old man. "If only you would be my bride. This old moon would never be lonely again."

"Me? A bride?" she gasped.

Esteban plucked at the Hag's arm "Come let us hurry!"

But the Hag shook him off and stood gazing at the old man. "No creature - man or beast - has called me beautiful before," she whispered. "I will stay and be his bride."

Then the Hag and the Man in the Moon fell joyfully into one another's arms. So happy were they with each other they scarcely looked up when Esteban waved farewell and sped away in his sleigh.

On the long trip back to earth Esteban never stopped urging on the deer. "Faster! Faster! Faster" And the deer obeyed so well that in no time at all they were back in Santa Land.

The anxious fairy folk swarmed around him.

"It's done!" cried Esteban holding up the little box.



**Esteban flung the powder on the beautiful woman's eyelids**

"I have the powder to break the spell!"

Then they all cheered mightily and Santa said, "It is Christmas Eve. My bag is packed. Come, Esteban, we will leave at once."

And once again the sleigh, heavy with gifts, took off into the sky. The exhausted reindeer held their heads high and shook their antlers gaily.

At last they swept down over a sleeping town. As they passed the town hall they could see the clock in the steeple. A quarter to midnight. In fifteen minutes it would be Christmas Day.

Gently the sleigh landed on the roof of the great white castle. As it did so a strange thing happened. A hawk who had been sleeping in his nest on the roof awoke and took off in flight. Then a little blue bird shook herself free of the nest and hopped to the sleigh.

"It's my blue bird!" cried Esteban, picking up the bird. "We've saved her anyway!" He gave the bird to Santa and then he climbed into the nearest chimney.

A second later he popped out in Charlotte's room. The little girl looked up in astonishment when he appeared.

"Esteban!" she cried. "Where have you been?"

Esteban put his hand over her mouth. "I'll tell you all later. Are you locked in?"

"Oh, no! My father said if I tried to get anyone to stop him the same thing would happen to that one as happened to you. So I promised I wouldn't bother him again. But, oh, Esteban, he is in his room now waiting for midnight to release the gas!"

"Go to him at once" cried Esteban rushing out the door. "Implore him to come to the room where the sleeping woman lies just once before he releases the gas!"

Charlotte flew through the corridors to do his bidding while he himself raced up the stairs to the room where the beautiful woman lay.

He opened the little box and, taking out a pinch of white powder, flung the powder on the closed eyelids.

There was a gentle movement on the bed and the sleeping woman opened her eyes.

For a long moment she and Esteban gazed at one another and then she sat up and said. "Where is my husband? Where is my own darling child?"

## Chapter 17

### A MERRY CHRISTMAS

The beautiful woman gazed at Esteban and repeated her question. "Where is my husband? Where is my own darling child?"

Instead of answering, Esteban ran to the door. His heart pounded and his hands grew cold. Was it too late after all? Had the professor already let loose the powerful gas?

Suddenly he heard far-away footsteps rushing through the corridors below.

"They are coming" he cried.

"My dear," said the woman curiously. "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"I am Esteban," he said. "You were put under a spell by the Hangdog Hag. The professor wishes to destroy all of Fairyland in order to destroy the Hag."

"All of Fairyland! How terrible! I shall not let him do it!"

At that moment Charlotte and the professor came into the room. The little girl took one look and threw herself into her mother's arms. The professor, his lips trembling, moved forward hardly daring to believe what he saw

"My dear!" said the woman.

Then the professor's eyes filled with joy and he clasped his wife to him.

In a moment she said, "This boy tells me you plan to destroy all fairies. Can that be so?"

"Not anymore," said the professor looking gratefully at Esteban. "I shall destroy the gas instead."

Once again he clasped his wife in his arms and Charlotte and Esteban slipped away,

"Oh, Esteban! How wonderful you are!" cried Charlotte. "You have saved everyone! How happy I am!"

She danced into her own room and her eyes widened in astonishment. Standing in the center of the room was an enormous tree decorated with blue and silver balls. Under the tree was a mountain of gifts

"It's from Santa!" cried Esteban laughing at the little girl's amazement. "Come see what you have!"

Charlotte dropped to her knees and reached for the gifts. The first package she picked up was marked "For Esteban."

"What can it be?" cried Charlotte. "Open it, Esteban. Open it, do!"

Esteban tore off the wrapping and opened the box. He broke into a joyful cry. "It's my wings! I have my wings again! Quickly - fasten them on me!"

Wide-eyed with delight, the little girl took the beautiful fragile wings from his fingers and gently pinned them to the boy's shoulders.

Immediately Esteban grew smaller and smaller until he stood no higher than Charlotte's socks. With a whoop of joy he spread his wings and flew to the window.

"Goodbye, Charlotte. I must fly away now to Fairyland for that is where I belong."

But before she could speak he suddenly placed his finger to his lips and whispered "Listen!"

Charlotte listened and heard the tinkle of sleigh bells. She leaned out the window with the elf. Far above them they saw Santa and his reindeer circling in the light of the moon.

"Oh. Merry Christmas!" breathed Charlotte joyously.

"Merry Christmas!" called Esteban spreading his wings and gliding away.

And from far above came Santa's answering call, "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas to all!"



**"Merry Christmas!" cried Esteban,  
flying back to Fairyland**

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