



Santa and the Haunted House

By LUCRECE BEALE



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Chapter 1

Once upon a time, in the Kingdom of Poo, there lived three little children named Jeremy, Sissy and Miss Jo.

Jeremy was the most grown up. He was 6. Miss Jo was the baby. She was 4. And Sissy was 5 and in-between.

One day, shortly before Christmas, the children were playing alone in their house on Round Hill Road. Their father and mother were away. They were lamp makers and they had gone to a nearby kingdom to sell their wares. They left the children in Jeremy's charge for he was a responsible boy and nearly always knew the right thing to do.

After the parents had gone, Jeremy and the girls played games. They played hide and seek, Sardines, Flinging statues, Follow the leader, Simon says and so on. They played all the games Jeremy could think of until finally he ran out of ideas.

Then Sissy said, "Now we'll playhouse. I'll be the mother and you be the father and Miss Jo can be the baby."

"I want to be the mother," said Miss Jo.

"You can't," exclaimed Sissy. "Then who would be the baby?"

"Jeremy can be the baby."

Jeremy turned white.

"I won't," he declared. He was prepared to do almost anything to entertain his sisters but this was clearly something he could not do.

"But -" begin Sissy.

"Never," said Jeremy firmly.

"I'm going to be the mother," repeated Miss Jo calmly.

"No - me!" Sissy stamped her foot.

Now both Sissy and Miss Jo burst into tears and poor Jeremy did not know what to do to restore peace in the family. His head whirled with the responsibility of it all

At this point there was a knock at the front door. Happy to have a distraction Jeremy rushed to open the door.

There was a man standing there, tall and thin, his shoulders dragged down by two large suitcases he carried in his hands. He had soft gray sort of sad smiling mouth. He seemed very tired.

The suitcases he carried were filled with books. The cases were broken. The seams were splitting and books were popping out everywhere.

"Who are you?" asked Jeremy, holding his sisters behind his back.

"I am a bookseller," said the man. "Would your parents like to buy some books?"

"My parents are away," said Jeremy politely.

"Oh." The man turned wearily away. "Well, then. I'll be on my way."

"Are they story books?" asked Sissy from behind Jeremy's back.

The man turned back and nodded. "Wonderful stories," he said, his eyes shining. "Stories about everything in the world."

"I like stories." whispered Sissy. She poked her head under Jeremy's arm and stared longingly at the cases filled with books.

"I wish I had a story," said Miss Jo. She dropped down and peered between Jeremy's knees.

The man smiled - a happy smile now. "Tell you what," he said. "Let me sit down and rest a bit and you shall have a story."

"But you see." said Jeremy, very businesslike, "We have no money. We can't buy a story."



“No need,” said the man. “I am not only a book seller. I am a storyteller as well. And the story I tell you will be free.”

The children shouted with pleasure. They pulled the Storyteller into the house and sat him down before the fire. They pushed his old broken suitcases to the side and sat down at his feet.

“Now, what shall the story be about?” asked the Storyteller.

“Adventurers!” cried Jeremy. “And sports. Evil goblins. Wicked spells and all that!”

“No, no,” said Sissy shaking her golden curls “About a beautiful Queen and a handsome Prince. About good children. Parties. Travels in the sky and all that!”

Miss Jo waved her hand. “I want a story about Santa Claus,” said she.

The Storyteller nodded solemnly at all be heard He stretched out his legs and closed his eyes, “Very well,” he murmured. “The story shall be about all these things.”

“A true story!” interrupted Jeremy. Sissy and Miss Jo chimed in, “Yes, yes, a true story!”

The Storyteller nodded, “Of, course.” He took a deep breath and the story began.

Chapter 2

NOG - THE BUGABOO

Once upon a time, began the Storyteller, there lived an evil Bugaboo in far away Santa Land.

“Oh, no,” said Sissy, sitting at the Storyteller’s feet. “Only good creatures live in Santa Land. They are Santa’s helpers. Even the imps and goblins are good.”

“Hush, Sissy,” said Jeremy, poking her with his elbow. “He knows the story.”

The Storyteller opened his eyes and gazed at Sissy. “You are right,” he said gently. “Only good creatures live in Santa Land ordinarily. But it is not always so. And the time I am telling about there was a very wicked Bugaboo there.”

Miss Jo gripped brother Jeremy’s arm and swallow. “W-what was his name?”

“Nog,” said the Storyteller. He closed his eyes and was silent as though he had been overcome by the very name of the wicked fiend. Finally, he began again.

In the first place, he said, Nog did not belong in Santa Land. He had always been a problem Bugaboo. The Queen Fairy who is responsible for these things placed him in Santa Land because she simply didn’t know what else to do with him.

She tried having him work in the Weather Factory which manufactures storms but Nog was always fouling things up. He pushed buttons that made snow storms in August. He sent showers of hail down at inappropriate moments - like at someone’s special birthday party. And one time he hid the key to the sun closet and the sun didn’t shine for seven whole weeks. Not once.

Of course, you can’t have things like that going on, so the Queen Fairy sent Nog to work with the Halloween witches, thinking if he were so tricky he might as well be useful while he was at it.

But Nog did things no spook or ghoul would ever have done.

On Halloween he would catch people’s cats and hang them up by their tails. He would take little children’s treats away from them and fill up their bags with stones. He would tie up old ladies’ doors so they could never get out of their homes - not even if there was a fire.

Well, he was giving the Witches a terrible name, you can imagine, so finally the Witches went to the Queen Fairy and said: us.”

“Look, you have to take Nog back. He’s ruining

The Queen Fairy was at her wit’s end because she didn’t know what to do with him. And Bugaboos never die, you know, so Nog was going to be around forever. Then, one day at a party, the Queen Fairy was eating ice cream with Santa Claus and she told him about the problem.

Santa said, “Why don’t you send Nog to Santa Land?”

“Oh my goodness,” exclaimed the Queen. “He would absolutely destroy Christmas!”

Santa took a second helping of peppermint Ice cream. When he had finished it he wiped his mouth with a big red handkerchief and said cheerfully, “I think I can handle him. Why not give it a try?”

There wasn’t anything else the Queen Fairy could do BUT give it a try so she sent Nog off to Santa Land and hoped for the best.

Now Nog was a purple-faced, toothless, hairless, bottle-shaped creature about as high as Santa’s knee. Seeing him with Santa so big and strong and jolly - you really would have thought Santa could handle him.

But oh, my!

The Storyteller paused and rolled his eyes towards the ceiling.

“What happened? What happened?” chorused the children.

Well, said the Storyteller. That Bugaboo made a SHAMBLES of Santa Land!



The Queen Fairy was at her wit’s end

Chapter 3

NOG IN SANTA LAND

“What did Nog do?” cried Sissy, rising to her knees. “What did he do?” echoes Miss Jo, pulling on the Storyteller’s boot.

“Let him tell,” said Jeremy, yanking his sisters down.

The Storyteller sighed. “What didn’t he do!” he said, shaking his head.

“Tell us! Tell us!”

“Well, for one thing, Nog would sneak into the workshops after the other elves had finished their work. He would unwrap all the toys that had been made that day. Then, while everyone else was sleeping, Nog would have himself the biggest time, pulling off dolls’ arms, tearing loose wires on electric trains, bidding pieces of jigsaw puzzles and things like that.”

“Why did he do it?” gasped Miss Jo.

“He was just plain mean,” said the Storyteller “He fixed it so that when little children came down Christmas morning and picked up their toys - the toys were broken before they even started to play with them.”

“I got a windup truck once.” said Jeremy suddenly. “The spring was broken and it never ran once.”

“Likely Nog did it,” said the Storyteller, nodding.

“But you said Nog wasn’t in Santa Land anymore,” protested Sissy.

“He’s not” said the Storyteller. “That’s what I’m about to tell you.” He pulled a pipe from his pocket, put it in his mouth without lighting it and went on with his story.

After that first Christmas, Santa got a whole train load of letters complaining about all the broken toys he’d left for children all over the world.

Santa was pretty upset. He called Nog in to see him and he said, “Are you responsible for all this trouble?”

“Maybe yes, maybe no,” said Nog without a bit of shame.

“I don’t understand,” said Santa. “Why do you hate children?”

“I hate everybody,” said Nog and his purple face got even more purple just thinking about how much he hated everybody.

“But why?” asked Santa.

“Because everybody hates me,” said Nog.

“I don’t hate you,” said Santa.

“Oh,” said Nog. “It’s your business to love people. But I like to hate and I like for everyone to hate me.”

Santa just couldn’t believe Nog really meant this so he said, “I’m giving you another chance to work in Santa Land.”

“Pshaw!” said Nog. “If I wanted to I could RUN Santa Land. I could get rid of you and then I’d run this place my own way. Wouldn’t that be something!”

This sounded so silly that Santa paid no attention. He said, “I’m putting you to work in the stables. I’m sure you will like the reindeer because animals can’t hate.”

Well, Nog went down to the stables and it appeared he was doing all right, at least as far as Santa could see. But that Christmas Eve when the deer were hitched to the sleigh they couldn’t fly.

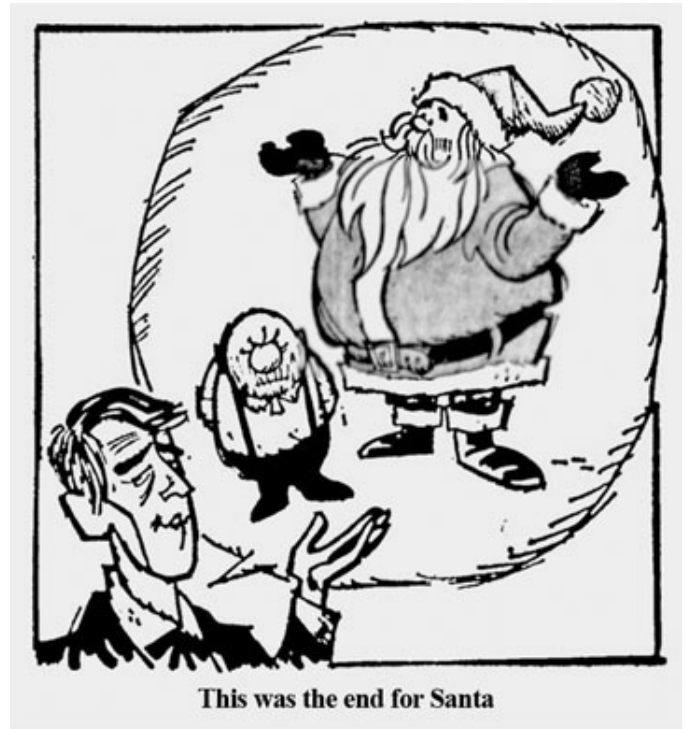
Nog had filled their stomachs full of ball bearings from the skate shop and the poor reindeer could hardly waddle out of the stable much less take off into the sky.

Santa had to call on every sprite, ghost, goblin and elf in Fairyland to help deliver toys that night. When the job was finally done and he got back to Santa Land, all the shops had burned down. Nog had dropped a lighted candle on a Christmas tree and set the whole place ablaze.

This was the end for Santa. He sent for the Fairy Queen and he said, “You were right, I can’t keep Nog in Santa Land.”

“Oh, dear.” sighed the Queen. “What will we do with him now?”

“Yeah,” said Nog, smirking. “What will you do with me now?”



Chapter 4

NOG COMES TO POO



The Storyteller stood up and stretched his legs. He stared for a long time into the fire as if he had forgotten the story he was telling. The children waited until golden-haired Sissy could stand it no longer.

"What did the Queen Fairy and Santa do with him?" she cried. "What did they do with old bad Nog?"

"They threw him out of Fairy-land," said the Storyteller staring into the fire.

"Oh, my!" breathed Miss Jo. "That must have been AWFUL!"

Yes, said the Storyteller. It had never been done before. No elf or fiend or witch or any other fairy creature had ever been expelled from the Magic Land of Make Believe. And Nog did not think the Fairy Queen would have the courage to do it to him.

But Santa said to the Queen, "You must sent him out of our world, take away all his rights and forbid him ever again to enter Storybook Land."

"You can't do that!" shouted Nog.

But I can," said the Queen, for she knew she had to or this one wicked creature would destroy all the good that fairies had done since time began. She waved her wand and said sadly, "I hereby expel you from my kingdom. Leave here and never return."

Nog turned on Santa and waved his fists. "It's all your doing!" he cried. "She would never done it if it hadn't been for you!"

"It's your own doing," said Santa. "And perhaps you will be happier in another world."

"THIS is my world," shouted Nog. "And I'll be back one day and I, not you, will give the orders then. Mark my words!"

He stamped his foot three times to show his rage. Then he turned and marched away.

"Where did he go?" cried Miss Jo.

The Storyteller turned and stared at her as if he had just awakened from a long sleep. "What?" he asked.

"Where did Nog go?" cried Sissy and Jeremy together.

"To the Kingdom of Poo," said the Storyteller.

"POO!" cried Jeremy.

"THIS Poo?" exclaimed Sissy.

The Storyteller nodded. "The very same."

"He's here now?" gasped Sissy.

The Storyteller nodded again.

The children huddled at his feet. Suddenly they felt cold and a shiver passed through them all.

Then Jeremy laughed and said, "But, it's only a story!" He took Miss Jo's hand and said, "Stop shaking. It's a story." Miss Jo laughed weakly and Sissy laughed and Jeremy said to the Storyteller, "Go on with the story."

Well, went on the Storyteller, Nog had left Santa Land and roamed all over the world looking for a place to settle. He was looking for a very special place because he thought of nothing but revenge and needed time and room and privacy to work out his plans.

Finally he came to the Kingdom of Poo. The people here were businesslike and practical and they didn't bother much about spooks or magic or things like that. In fact, a lot of people in Poo didn't even believe in Santa Claus. This suited Nog just fine because what would such people care if someone they didn't believe in just stopping being?

Nog walked around Poo until he found a beaten-up, old house on Burning Tree Road. No one had lived in it for a hundred years. The doors were falling off and the roof was caved in and the front steps had crumbled away.

Nog moved into the house. To keep people away he hung a sign out front saying "This House is Haunted."

And it was, too.

Chapter 5

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

According to the Storyteller, Nog's house on Burning Tree Road was a good place to stay away from because all kinds of strange things went on there.

Some people swore they'd seen green smoke coming out of the broken-down chimney but when they went to investigate they found no living thing and not even ashes in the fireplace.

Eight great black buzzards took to circling over Nog's house. Day and night they were there, never making a sound except for the swish of their wings. Round and round they flew waiting, waiting.

There were lights, too. Purple lights and red ones and green. They flickered off and on, now in one window, now in another moving so fast a person could hardly be sure he'd seen anything at all.

The nearest house to Nog's house was almost half a mile away but the folks who lived there got so upset they packed up and moved away. They put their house up for sale and it was still for sale today because nobody wanted to move next to the Haunted House.

Now It happened, said the Storyteller, that one day, three little children from Round Hill Road set out to find a Christmas tree.

"Round Hill Road?" said Sissy. "That's where WE live!"

"Oh?" said the Storyteller. "That's a coincidence all right." And he went on with the story.

The three children wanted a pine tree - a long needle white pine — and -

"What were their names?" interrupted Sissy.

The Storyteller's eyebrows rose. "Whose names?"

"Those children - the ones looking for the Christmas tree."

The Storyteller thought for a while then he said, "Jeremy, Sissy, and Miss Jo."

Miss Jo clapped her hands. "That's us!"

"Not necessarily," said Jeremy. He was trying his best to separate fact and fiction but he was having a hard time of it.

"Is it us?" demanded Miss Jo of the Storyteller.

"Perhaps," said the Storyteller. "Perhaps not. The names are certainly the same."

"Well," said Sissy, "did that Sissy have curls like me?"

The Storyteller pondered and said, "Yes, I believe she did."

"So, go on with the story," burst out Jeremy. "What happened?"

Well the three children searched down all the roads of Poo, hunting for the just-right Christmas tree. They found lots of pines but every tree had something just a little wrong with it. One was lopsided, another too dumpy, another too skinny. And so on.

Eventually they came to Burning Tree Road. They had never been on this road before and they didn't like it very much because it was lonely and had hardly any houses on it.

The older children wanted to turn back but suddenly Miss Jo, the youngest child, called out, "Look yonder! There's our tree!"

The others looked where she pointed and sure enough, there was the tree they'd been searching for. It was fat and sturdy, yet tall enough, and it was even-branched all around. Best of all, it belonged to no one because it was growing in a tangled woods behind a broken-down house that everyone knew had been empty a hundred years.

Jeremy pulled out his hatchet and the three children ran towards the tree. But just as they reached the house there came a terrible rumbling and clattering and hullabaloo as if the whole place were falling down. At the same time a great green cloud puffed out of the door and in the middle of the cloud, heading straight for the children, was purple-faced, toothless, bottle-shaped Nog.



In the middle of the great green cloud was Nog

Chapter 6

THE STORYTELLER FALLS ASLEEP

The Storyteller seemed very tired now. His voice got so low the children could hardly hear him. They leaned forward and tugged at his legs and urged him on.

“What did Nog do when he saw the children?”

He came out of his green cloud, said the Storyteller and he shook his fists at the children and shouted, “What are you doing here?”

The two little girls hid behind their brother’s back and all three children shivered and shook. Then Jeremy thought. ‘We have as much right here as he does.’ So he said, “We wanted that tree, for Christmas.”

Nog threw back his head and laughed and laughed.

“Forget the tree,” he shouted. “You’ll never see another Christmas.”

“W-why not?” asked the boy.

“Because there isn’t going to be Christmas anymore. Not when Santa Claus eats the cake I’m making him.”

“What kind of cake?” quavered Jeremy.

“A Trouble Cake!” shouted Nog. “Now you clear out of here and don’t come back again because little children don’t agree with me.”

The children, hardly daring to breath, backed away inch by inch. When they got to the road, they turned and ran all the way home.

The Storyteller stopped speaking. His head fell forward on his chest and he began to snore. Miss Jo jumped up and pulled on his arm.

“Don’t go to sleep!” she wailed. “Tell us what happened!”

The Storyteller snored even louder.

“Wake up!” cried Sissy pulling his hair. Jeremy put his mouth

to the Storyteller’s ear and shouted “Wake up! Wake up!”

But Storyteller slept on.

Miss Jo began to cry. “I want to know what happened!”

“He’ll tell us when he wakes up,” said Jeremy.

“But maybe he’ll NEVER wake up!” wept Miss Jo. “And then Nog will send Santa the Trouble Cake and Santa will die and there’ll never be Christmas again.”

“Oh, don’t be silly,” said Jeremy. “It’s only a story”

“How do you know?” demanded Sissy. “Maybe Nog is real. We were in it and we are real.”

“But,” said Jeremy uncertainly, “he’s a Storyteller.”

“Prove it,” said Sissy.

“All right,” said Jeremy. “I’ll go to the Haunted House and see if Nog is there.” He began putting on his coat.

Sissy and Miss Jo stared at him in horror. Then Sissy said, “I’ll go, too.” And she snatched up her snowsuit.

“Wait for me! Wait for me!” cried Miss Jo and she flew to the closet to dig out her boots.

Bundled in scarves and wraps, the children set out. At first they ran but when they reached Burning Tree Road they went slower and slower. When they saw the old broken-down house at the far curve of the road, they stopped.

“I’d better go on alone,” said Jeremy. “No,” said Sissy. “I’m coming, too.” “Me, too,” said Miss Jo.

“Well, I’ll lead,” said Jeremy. “You two stay behind me.”

Single file they crept on tip-toe the rest of the way - so quietly a mouse would not have heard them. They came to the old house and there sure enough was a sign out front saying “This House is Haunted.”

Sissy gasped but Jeremy said, “Shh. Anybody could have put it there.”

Then he crept up to the house and climbed over the crumbled-down stairs and looked right through the doorway. Sissy and Miss Jo, too scared to come but even more scared to stay behind peered over his shoulders.

It was so dim inside that for a while they could see nothing at all. Then they heard a sound and saw a sight that chilled their blood and froze them to the spot.



But when they reached Burning Tree Road . . .

Chapter 7

THREE LITTLE HAUNTS

What the children saw in the Haunted house was a purple-faced, toothless, baldheaded, bottle-shaped creature and what they heard was the beating of a wooden spoon in a mixing bowl.

They knew right away that the purple-faced, toothless, baldheaded, bottle-shaped creature was Nog and what Nog was beating up in the mixing bowl was a Trouble Cake for Santa Claus.

There was a candle on the table and by its flickering light the children saw all the ingredients of the cake as old Nog took them up and threw them in the bowl.

There was a bottle of spider's legs, a box of powered stinging nettles, a dozen cobra eggs. There were little piles of sifted Hate and Greed and Worry measured out on wax paper. There was a tablespoon of mashed jelly fish and a jar of Headaches.

Muttering to himself, Nog beat up the awful mixture. At the end he dumped in a can of sugar to disguise the taste. Then he popped the whole thing into the oven.

Only then did the children, standing frozen in the doorway, come to their senses. Without a sound they turned as one, leaped off the porch and ran as fast as their legs could carry them all the way home.

"He's really there!" they cried, bursting into the house. "It's not a story! Nog is there!"

But the house was dark and the fire was out and the Storyteller was gone. They ran through all the rooms of the house calling for him.

They looked in the closets and under the beds and down the road. The Storyteller was gone and his suitcases filled with books were gone. The only sign that he'd ever been there at all was the cushion on the floor where he'd sat before the fire while he told his story.

The children looked at each other in dismay. Miss Jo pulled on Jeremy's arm. "Is old bad Nog going to send that terrible cake to Santa Claus?"

"Of course he is!" exclaimed Sissy. "That's what the story said and everything in the story is true!"

Miss Jo began to cry and Sissy said, "Oh, Jeremy, what will we do?"

All this time Jeremy had been thinking. Now he said, "We could scare Nog out of the house."

"Oh, I couldn't go back there! It's HAUNTED!"

"But we could be the haunts," said Jeremy. "We could dress up like ghosts and go down there and scare Nog away."

"Like Halloween!" cried Miss Jo. She ran into her room and came back with a sheet over her head, waving her arms and crying, "Whoooo . . . Whoooo . . ."

Jeremy and Sissy raced for sheets and the three of them tore out of the house, the sheets flying out behind them. It was dark

now. The roads were empty. There was no one to see or wonder at three little ghosts stealing through the town.

When they came to the Haunted House they stood outside holding hands. Jeremy put away the flashlight he had used to guide them. There was not a light in the house and the only sound was their own scared breathing.

They pulled themselves up on the porch and peeped through the door. There was no sign of Nog.

"Now!" whispered Jeremy.

The three ghosts burst into the house, screeching and howling and waving their sheeted arms like three demented haunts.

If any other haunt had been there it surely would have been frightened away. But apparently the house was empty. Jeremy turned on his flashlight and peered about, growing braver all the while.

Not only was there no Nog. There was no sign of the cake he had been making.

Then Sissy leaned over and opened the oven door. Swoosh! A towering white phantom burst from the oven, went "Wheee. . . ." and, spreading immense arms, floated over the children.



Chapter 8

A LETTER TO SANTA

Jeremy dropped his flashlight and the three little haunts tore out of the haunted house. They scrambled off the porch and over the crumpled stairs and were half way to the road when Miss Jo screamed. "Jeremy! Help!"

Jeremy's heart thudded as he realized that Miss Jo was not beside him. She had never gotten out the door and the towering ghost had clutched her!

"I'm coming" shouted Jeremy and with Sissy at his side he turned and stumbled back to the house.

Miss Jo screamed, "He's got me! Oh Jeremy, he's holding on to me!"

Jeremy lurched up the broken steps and across the porch, tripped over his sheet and sprawled at Miss Jo's feet. He picked himself up and grasped Miss Jo's hands "Why there's nobody holding you!" he cried. "There's nothing here at all."

"But I can't move!" quavered Miss Jo.

"It's your sheet," said Jeremy. "It's caught on a nail!" He yanked at the sheet and Miss Jo came loose and spun into his arms. The two of them staggered backwards, piled into Sissy who had just reached the porch, and all three of them landed in a heap at the bottom of the broken down stairs.

They picked themselves up and holding their sheets off the ground raced for home. Miss Jo went in first. Hardly had she gone through the door than she shook all over and backed out again.

"He's in there! NOG'S in there!"

"W-where?" whispered Jeremy.



What has happened to Miss Jo?

"Right in the hall - across from the door!"

"It's only you!" he cried. He pushed Miss Jo ahead of him and pointed out her reflection in the hall mirror

Miss Jo sobbed with relief. She took off her sheet and said, "I don't ever want to be a ghost again!"

"Me either," cried Sissy.

"Nor I," said Jeremy. "But we've got to do something. Nog must have already sent that cake to Santa and if Santa eats it - I don't know what might happen to him!"

"Let's write a letter and tell him," said Sissy "We could put the letter in the fireplace and Santa would get it and then he would know."

This seemed like a very good idea. Jeremy gut out pencil and paper and wrote "Dear Santa, Don't eat any cake - wherever it comes from. It might be from Nog and it is a bad cake. It will kill you maybe and then there won't be any more Christmas. We know because we saw Nog making it and he told us what he planned to do. Love Jeremy, Sissy and Miss Jo."

He sealed the letter and put it on the hearth. Sissy poured water on the dying coals in the fireplace so it wouldn't be too warm for Santa. Miss Jo put a glass of milk and two cookies beside the note in case he might be hungry.

The children went to bed very pleased with what they had done. But the next morning the letter was still there. The children sat and worried all day. They couldn't manage to play any games at all. That night they pushed the letter further into the fireplace and went to bed hoping this time Santa would come.

But the next morning the letter was still there

Jeremy said, "We'll have to go to him."

"To SANTA LAND?" cried Miss Jo.

"How could we do it?" asked Sissy.

"I don't know," said Jeremy. "But we've got to go."

Chapter 9

A TRIP ON ICE SKATES

Jeremy, Sissy and Miss Jo bundled up in their warmest clothes. They hung their skates over their shoulders and started out for Santa Land.

The only thing Jeremy knew was that Santa Land was in the North and there was a river flowing through the Kingdom of Poo and it flowed from the North. The river was frozen over and Jeremy was sure they could skate all the way to Santa Land.

“Do you think you can do it?” he asked Miss Jo.

“Oh yes,” she declared. “I can skate around the whole world.”

A moment later this didn't seem too likely because as soon as Miss Jo had fastened on her skates and scuttled onto the river she went plunk! flat on her back.

“I'll help her,” said Sissy. She helped Miss Jo up and held her hand. Miss Jo's feet shot out from under and plunk! both she and Sissy were down.

Jeremy's brow furrowed. How would they ever get there? But Miss Jo jumped up and smiled joyfully. “I just remembered. I can't skate forwards but I can backwards!” She turned around and pushed with one foot and then the other and glided smoothly up the frozen river.

Jeremy sighed with relief. He sped after Miss Jo and Sissy followed. For hours and hours they skated but it seemed they hadn't even gotten out of the Kingdom of Poo

Jeremy's legs ached and Sissy's ankles kept turning on their sides and Miss Jo - sailing along backwards kept tripping over bumps and ridges in the ice, crashing down so many times she was soon black and blue.

The sun rose high and then started down. Miss Jo rubbed her bruises and said, “If I fall down again I'm just going to stay there!” Sissy said, “Oh, Jeremy, won't we ever be there?”

“Soon,” said Jeremy. “It's bound to be soon.”

But little did he know how far it was or how many obstacles lay in their path. The first obstacle was around the next bend in the river.

Jeremy was skating ahead of Sissy and Miss Jo pushing out hard with one foot and then the other - push, glide, push, glide - anxious to see what lay around the bend. Then he was around the bend and crack! the ice split beneath him and splash! he was in the water.

A sign saying “Watch out. ‘Thin Ice!’” floated beside him.

“Jeremy! Where are you?” shouted Sissy, rounding the bend

“Stay back!” shouted Jeremy, shivering with cold and fighting to keep his head above the icy water. “Stay back!”

But it was too late. Sissy shot through the ice and landed beside him.

“Miss Jo!” screamed Jeremy frantically. “Stay away!”



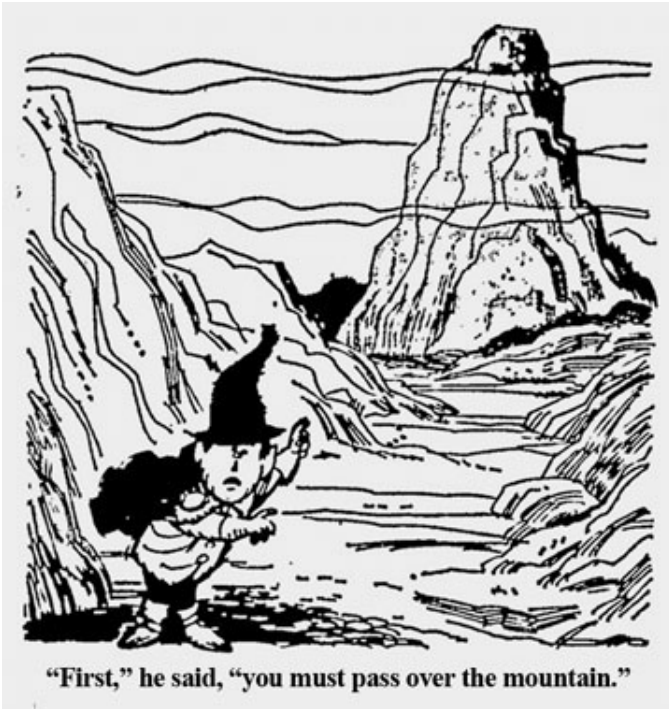
Jeremy was skating ahead of Sissy and Miss Jo

But along came Miss Jo, gilding backwards without a backward look and splash! she was beside them!

Neither Sissy nor Miss Jo could swim and Jeremy couldn't swim too well even by himself. Now he held up both his sisters and kicked his legs which were weighed down with the skates.

Whenever he could get his mouth out of the water he gasped, “Hang on. We'll make it!” and pushed toward the edge of the ice. But every time he tried to grasp the ice it broke off and the hole got bigger and bigger. Pretty soon Jeremy knew they weren't going to make it.

Chapter 10
THE ICE SPRITES



Jeremy couldn't struggle any longer. He was turning to ice. He knew if he pushed Sissy and Miss Jo away he would have a chance to save himself. But he couldn't let go of them, not even if it meant never getting to Santa Land to save Santa from eating the Trouble Cake.

He held on, too exhausted even to gasp anymore. He was about to go under for maybe the last time when Miss Jo screamed, "There's something coming! Look!"

Jeremy threw back his head one last time and saw - he wondered if it were a dream - a whole army of little creatures racing across the ice toward them!

"They'll fall through!" he thought.

But the host of Sprites - for that is what they were - skimmed over the thinnest ice right up to the hole itself. They threw out ropes and Sissy and Miss Jo grabbed them and even Jeremy managed to get one in his frozen hands. In two seconds the children were dragged out of the water and carried safely to shore.

It was a family of Ice Sprites who had saved them. They were so tiny and so many and moved so fast there seemed like hundreds of them. They built a fire and took off the children's clothes and wrapped the children in blankets made of the insides of cocoons. They fed them cup after cup of warm butterfly milk.

Soon the children were fine again. Miss Jo, who was the first to recover, asked, "For goodness sake! Who are you?"

"Ice Sprites," said the leader of the Sprites. He was the grandfather - or maybe even the great-great-grandfather of all the other Sprites. "We live on the ice and skate all winter long. In the summer we grow wings and get real tiny and we skate right on top of the water."

"Oh. I've seen you!" exclaimed Sissy. "I could never understand why you don't even get wet."

"That's because we have hardly any weight," said the Sprite. "But you are different, you know, and you should never skate on thin ice. It is lucky for you we felt the ice crack though we were miles and miles away. We thought a star had fallen on the river! Where on earth were you racing to, that you did not see the sign we had put on the ice to warn people?"

"We are going to Santa Land," said Miss Jo.

"Good heavens!" cried the Sprite. And all his descendants threw up their hands in astonishment. "Santa Land is mountains and oceans away!"

Jeremy looked gloomy. "But we've got to get there!"

"Why? Can't you wait for Christmas?"

"It's not that," said Jeremy.

Then he told how they had seen Nog making a Trouble Cake filled with spider legs and worries and cobra eggs and all kinds of pains. And how Nog was planning to send the cake to Santa so Santa would eat it and die and there wouldn't be any more Christmas.

"So you see," said Jeremy, "we've just got to get to Santa Land to warn Santa in time."

The Ice Sprites made sounds of alarm. They shook their heads and clustered in groups and whispered behind their hands, then the grandfather Sprite said, "We'll help you get to Santa Land The way is long but you'll have help all along the way. There is not one creature in Fairyland who does not hate the name of Nog. All of us will speed you on for you are right - you must get to Santa Land!"

Then he pointed to a nearby mountain that reached as high as the lowest star in the sky.

"First," he said, "you must pass over the mountain."

The children sighed and their spirits fell. "How can we do that?" asked Jeremy.

"You'll soon see," smiled the grandfather Sprite and he called all the Ice Sprites to his side.

Chapter 11

ZOOMING OVER THE MOUNTAIN

The grandfather Sprite gave orders and all the little Sprites set to work. They chopped down small trees and whittled and planed and waxed. They fashioned strips of leather and wove bark into ropes.

While they were doing this the children were putting on their clothes which had gotten dry and warm in front of the fire. Then the old Sprite said "See what we have made for you."

He gave each child a pair of skis and two poles and a pair of sturdy boots!

Jeremy's eyes nearly popped from his head. All his life he had wanted a pair of skis and these were the most beautiful he had ever imagined. He put on the boots and fastened his feet in the straps. He took a pole in each hand and dropped a loop over each wrist. He felt like a king of the mountain.

Then his face fell and he said sadly, "I can't ski."

"On these skis anybody can ski," said the Sprite. "You can even ski uphill and that's something nobody has ever done before."

He helped Sissy and Miss Jo onto their skis and he said. "Just push on the poles and away you go - up and over the mountain!"

The children pushed hard on the poles and swooped away over the snowy banks of the river, across a meadow and UP the mountain side. The Ice Sprites raced behind them shouting and waving but the children went so fast that soon the Sprites were left behind.

Up, up they went until, before they knew it, they had passed right over the top of the mountain and begun to skim down the other side. They clutched their poles and bent their knees and

the skis did all the rest. They did snowplows and stem turns and christies. They flew over huge hummocks of snow and landed on their feet. They traversed the mountain side and schussed straight down the last long slope, their scarves flying over their shoulders, their faces shining with happiness.

Suddenly Miss Jo wailed, "My skis don't ski anymore."

"Mine don't either," cried Sissy. She pushed hard on the poles but nothing happened.

Jeremy, too, had come to a stop. They pushed and pushed on the poles but try as they would they could only slide the skis like ordinary folk on ordinary skis.

"Oh, I wish we could ride some more!" said Sissy.

"And so you shall," said a voice out of nowhere.

The children looked but they could not find where the voice came from. Jeremy called out. "Where are you? Who are you?"

"Coming right up!" said the voice.

A funny little gnome climbed out of a hole in the ground not 50 feet from where the children stood. On his shoulder he carried an enormous object shaped like a half a doughnut with each end tapered to a point.

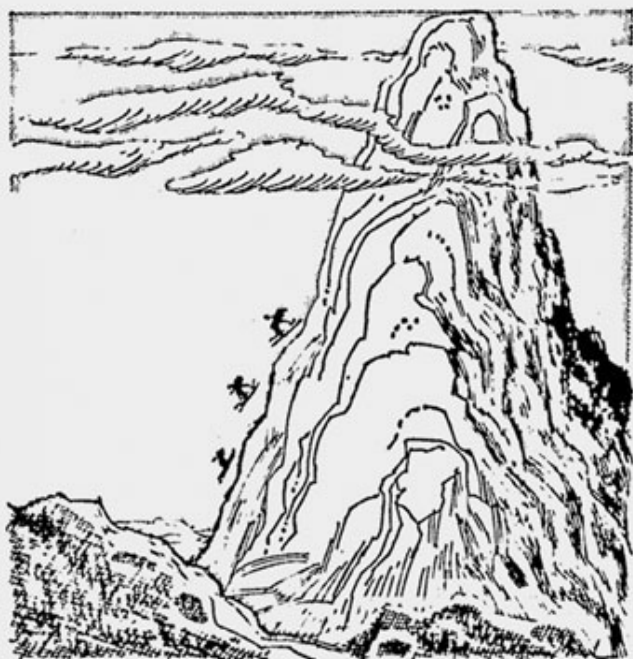
"I am Manfred the Moonlighter," said the gnome as he set down his burden. "You probably have never heard of me but I've heard of you because the Ice Sprites sent me a message."

"Then - you're going to help us get to Santa Land?" asked Jeremy.

"Of course. That Nog has got to be stopped!"

Manfred rolled the enormous half-doughnut-shaped thing around and set it on its side and the children saw it wasn't a doughnut at all but an honest-to-goodness crescent moon!

"Climb on," said Manfred. "This is your next ride to Santa Land."



They swooped UP the mountain side

Chapter 12
MOON RIDE

Jeremy and Sissy and Miss Jo took off their skis and sat down in the curve of the crescent moon. It was a very tight fit and Miss Jo kept slipping off the end.

Finally Jeremy climbed to the top of the curve and stretched out flat with his arms and legs wrapped around the fat sides of the moon. Now there was plenty of room for Sissy and Miss Jo. They straddled the lower curve. Sissy held on to Miss Jo and Miss Jo held on to the sides and they were ready to go.

All this time Manfred the Moonlighter held on to the moon with both hands. He kept saying, "Hurry now. This thing has to go up on time!" When they were all set, he looked at the big watch on his wrist and began to count off the seconds.

"Six - five - four - three - two - ONE!" When he said ONE he let go of the moon it sprang into the sky.

Jeremy poked his head over the side and waved at the Moonlighter. "How will we know where to get off?"

The gnome waved back and shouted something but what it was the children couldn't hear. They were already too far away. The ground slipped away. They could see whole towns and even whole kingdoms as lights went on in thousands of homes below them.

Presently the lights disappeared and the moon sailed on.

Then Miss Jo cried, "Look!"

She pointed to a silver star passing by. Miss Jo and Sissy leaned far out and tried to catch the star in their hands but the star sparkled daily and glided on, leaving a trail of silver star dust behind.

A little cloud floated nearby. The moon sailed right into it. For a minute the children couldn't see anything at all not even each other. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying "So you are the children who are going to see Santa"

Jeremy nearly fell off his perch, he was so astonished. But he said, "Yes, we are going to warn him about Nog and the Trouble Cake."

"Listen, then," said the voice. "Five more clouds will pass across the moon. In the fifth cloud count to seven and drop off the moon."

"Y-you mean just drop off?" stammered Jeremy.

But the voice was still and the moon had passed out of the cloud.

Presently they passed through a second cloud.

"That's number one," said Jeremy, bending down a finger.

After a while there was another and then another and another and now four of Jeremy's fingers were bent. He said. "The next one is the fifth and here it comes!"

A second later they were hidden in the fifth cloud. Jeremy counted to seven and shouted, "Let go!"

He couldn't see his sisters but he heard Miss Jo cry, "I'm afraid!" Sissy shouted, "Jeremy she won't let go!"

They were right in the middle of the cloud now. In another moment they would be out of it and it would be too late. Jeremy slid down to the bottom of the crescent. He couldn't see anything but he could feel first Sissy's foot and then Miss Jo's. He grabbed one foot in each hand and threw himself forward. All three children tumbled off the moon and sank into the cloud.

For an instant they thought they were going to fall right on through but the cloud was like a feather pillow. They lay in it as warm and comfortable as if they were in their own bed at home.



The moon with its passengers sailed through the sky

Chapter 13

THE TROUBLE CAKE

The cloud carried the children across half the world until it came finally to the Milky Way and gently dropped the children there.

The children found themselves sitting in a sea of stars that stretched in an unbroken path across the sky and down to the edge of the earth.

Miss Jo began to slide clown the path. "It's slippery!" she cried. "Like a bamboo slide!"

Jeremy and Sissy began to slide. Before they knew it, they were all three spinning down the Milk Way – faster, faster - on and on for thousands of miles. When the slide came to an end, the three children went right on falling until plop! plunk! ploop! they landed, one after the other, in a soft white snowdrift that was piled against a little red house. The door of the house flew open and a plump whiskered fellow burst out, crying. "What's this?"

The children knew without being told that they had reached Santa Land at last. They dug themselves out of the snowdrift and scrambled to Santa's side. Miss Jo threw her arms around his legs and cried. "Oh, Santa! Nog's going to kill you dead!"

Santa's mouth dropped open and he stared at her. Then he threw back his head and laughed. "Come inside. We'll have some cake and you can tell me all."

"CAKE?" cried Sissy.

"Nog's cake?" asked Jeremy in alarm.

Santa shooed them through the door. "I don't know whose cake. It just arrived and it is a very pleasant surprise. I was just about to have a piece."



The children went spinning down the Milky Way

He pointed to a huge chocolate-covered cake on the table by the fire. The children looked at it. Their eyes popped wide and they all began to talk at once.

"It's Nog's cake! It's filled with Hate and Greed and Powdered Trouble. It's got rattle-snake tongues in it and spider legs. It's -"

"Wait, wait," said Santa smiling. "Suppose you tell me one at a time Start at the beginning and tell it to the end."

He sat down and put Sissy on one knee and Miss Jo on the other. He nodded to Jeremy and said, "Now begin."

So Jeremy told how the children had gone to the Haunted House in the Kingdom of Poo and there they had seen the wicked Nog making a terrible cake for Santa because he hated Santa and Christmas and everything, If Santa ate the cake he would die and Nog would take over Santa Land.

While Jeremy talked, Santa's face grew very stern. When Jeremy finished, Santa got up and took a knife and cut right through the cake. It was a dark color with a white cream filling. It looked delicious but a juicy bit of icing fell on the plate and Santa picked it up and looked at it and saw it wasn't icing at all but a squashed caterpillar's eye.

Santa was very upset. Nog had been put out of Fairyland, he said, because he was so wicked. But apparently he hadn't changed his ways so he - Santa - had better go and talk to Nog and see what could be done.

Santa put on his hat and scarf and said, "Come with me to Poo and we'll settle this right now."

"But," gasped Jeremy. "You can't go to Nog's house. It's Haunted!"

"Pshaw!" said Santa. "I'm not afraid of Nog's haunts."

"But - what will you do if he catches you?"

Santa took a purple stone from his pocket and held it out for all to see. "This is a charm from the Fairy Queen," he said. "It will save me, I think."

Chapter 14

THE PURPLE STONE

The charm which Santa showed the children was a purple stone, smooth to the touch and no longer than Miss Jo's thumb.

"The Queen Fairy gave me this long ago," Santa told the children. "With it in my hand I can turn into any shape I wish. It has been very useful to me for I have often had to change into a broom to get down small chimneys and into a mouse when a child has come upon me filling his stocking."

"You're only fooling!" said Miss Jo uncertainly.

"Indeed I am not," said Santa. "In fact I shall change now into a hummingbird and I will change you also into hummingbirds and we will fly directly to the Kingdom of Poo."

With that he rubbed the purple stone and became a hummingbird. Before the children could recover from their astonishment, they too had become birds - a little one that was Jeremy, a middle-sized one that was Sissy and a teeny one that was Miss Jo. They spread their wings and flew once around the room and then they followed Santa through a crack in the window and soared away from Santa Land.

Hummingbirds can fly faster than the eye can follow, and if they are charmed they can fly faster than the time it takes to tell about it. So it was that Santa and the three children arrived before dawn on Burning Tree Road in the Kingdom of Poo.

As soon as they lighted, they all turned back into their natural shapes and Santa said, "You children go home now for Nog can be very troublesome and it is best that I handle this by myself."

No matter how much they begged and argued he would not let them stay so they left him and walked away. But as soon as Santa's back was turned, the children left the road and, ducking from bush to bush, followed Santa to the Haunted House.

Santa walked right up to the house brave as could be - and went right through the door without knocking or calling out or anything. The children streaked around the side of the house and standing on tiptoe peered through a broken window, scarcely daring to breathe.

There was purple-faced, tooth-less, hairless, bottle-shaped Nog sitting on a box and getting ready to eat his breakfast which was fried hoydoy. In walked Santa and Nog couldn't believe his eyes. He fell over backwards and the hoydoy splattered on the floor. Nog scrambled to his feet and said, "I thought you were dead!"

"No," said Santa. "I didn't eat your cake so I'm feeling very well but I've come to have a talk with you. You just can't go on acting like this. Someone may get hurt."

"Talk," said Nog. "That's nothing. Talk all you want. It can't hurt me"

"Well," said Santa, taking out the purple stone, "I also have a charm. I can change you or me into any shape I wish so you had better be careful and behave yourself."

"Ha!" said Nog defiantly. "I don't believe it. Let me see you turn yourself into an old woman for instance."

"Very well," said Santa. "I'll show you."

He rubbed the stone and instantly he was an old, old woman, bent and crippled, shaking all over.

"See," said Santa in the old woman's quavering voice. "Now you know what I can do to you."

"Not now!" cried Nog and before the old woman could change shape, Nog snatched the purple stone from her doddering fingers.

"Watch me!" he cried. He rubbed the stone gleefully in his own bony fingers and suddenly he himself was Santa Claus!



Chapter 15

NOG'S CHRISTMAS PLANS

The children, peeping through the window, gasped in horror to see Santa turn into an old woman and Nog turn into Santa right before their eyes.

They crouched in the bushes beside the house and tried to think what to do.

Jeremy clenched his hands and whispered. "I'm going in there. Nog's not much bigger than I am. I'll -"

"But, he has the purple stone!" hissed Sissy. "He could turn you into a spider or a worm or anything!"

"But what's going to happen if Nog is Santa!" moaned Jeremy.

At that moment Nog was explaining to the real Santa exactly what was going to happen.

"This is better than anything I had hoped for," he exclaimed as he gleefully waved the purple stone under Santa's nose. "I shall go to Santa Land and turn all your workers into jelly-fish."

Poor Santa stood there, bent and crippled, leaning on his old woman's stick, hardly able to see from the old woman's aged eyes. "Christmas is only two days away," he quavered. "Be Santa if you like and do what you want with me. But let the children have their Christmas."

"Of course!" cried Nog. "They will have Christmas they will never forget and they will never want another Christmas after this!"

"W-what will you do?" asked Santa, trembling with rheumatism.

"I shall fill all their stockings with hot black tar," cried Nog, dancing up and down at the thought of it. "I'll give them boxes of candy stuffed with stomach cramps. I'll leave each mother a list of all the bad things her child has done that she doesn't know about."

"Oh, wicked Nog!" cried Santa.

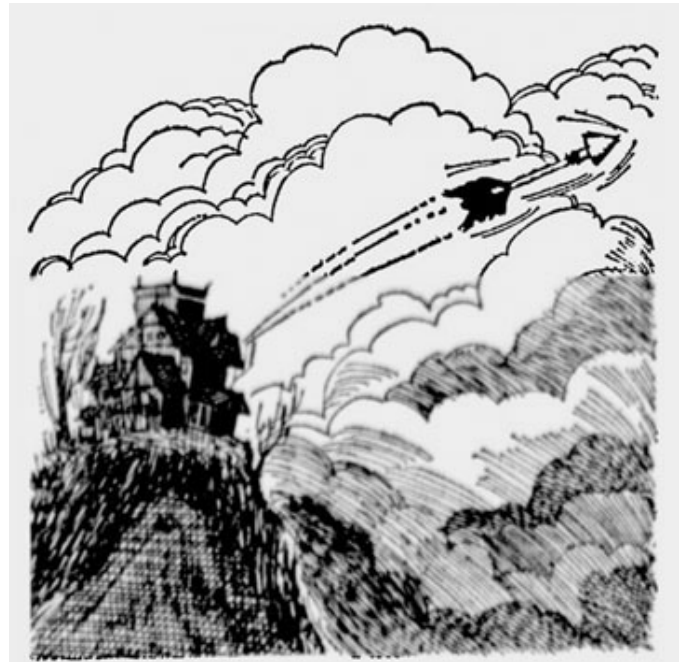
"And last but not least," said Nog, "I'll leave them all bundles of matches that look like jackstraws and when they play with them they will burn the house down!"

"Horrors, horrors!" cried Santa. Helpless tears rolled down his wrinkled cheeks.

"Perhaps when I finish my Christmas Eve journey I'll stop by here and see how you are doing," said Nog. "Though I don't expect you'll last long - a poor old woman unable to move or help herself! Well, Merry Christmas!"

With that, Nog rubbed the purple stone and changing himself into a winged arrow, shot from the house.

As soon as he had gone Jeremy and Sissy and Miss Jo wiggled out of their hiding places and burst into the Haunted House. They found poor Santa trembling on a broken-down orange crate, head bent over a crooked cane, tears rolling down wrinkled cheeks.



Changing himself into an arrow, he shot from the house

He stared at the children through his age dimmed eyes. Then he gasped and his hands shook and he whispered, "Thank goodness you are here!"

"Don't cry," said Sissy putting her curls against the wrinkled cheeks. "We'll help you."

"It's not me that's crying," said Santa. "It's the old woman I've become. I can't help it. I can't walk or do anything."

"We'll take you to our house," exclaimed Miss Jo. "We'll feed you and keep you warm and take care of you forever and ever."

Santa shook his head. "It's not me that matters. It's Christmas. Oh dear, it's all my fault for boasting of what I could do with the charm. Now I've ruined everything and Christmas is lost."

Jeremy stood up straight and tall in front of Santa and said, "We could stop Nog."

"How? He's Santa now and I'm a shaking old woman."

"We could break the charm," said Jeremy.

Chapter 16

VISIT TO THE FAIRY QUEEN

Sana took Jeremy's small hand in his shaking fingers. "Only the Queen Fairy can break the charm," he said. "And Fairyland is far away. I am too decrepit to get there."

"C-could I get there?" asked Jeremy.

"You can," said Santa, "It you believe you can."

"Oh, I do!" declared Jeremy.

"I do, too!" exclaimed Sissy. "Me, too," chimed in Miss Jo.

"Then go," said Santa. "Go as fast as you can to the very end of Burning Tree Road. Turn left on Little Branch Trail. When you come to the fork, take 3 giant steps down Red Cow Path. There you will find a chestnut tree. Where the second branch meets the trunk there is a hole and in the hole there is a bottle. Take one sip each from the bottle."

"Is that all?" asked Jeremy.

"That is all. Only hurry, for time is very short."

The children raced away and did all they had been told. But when they came at last to the chestnut tree the lowest branch was too high for Jeremy to reach.

He shimmied up the trunk but just as he was about to reach the branch he lost his grip and crashed to the ground, cutting his lip and knocking out a tooth.

He put the tooth in his pocket and got on his hands and knees. "Climb on my back," he told Sissy. Sissy did and then Miss Jo wiggled up both of them until she was high enough to reach the first branch. She got to the second branch and there was a hole where it joined the trunk and in the hole was a tiny blue bottle.

She climbed down with the bottle and all three children took a sip from it. Hardly had they swallowed than they fell on the ground in a heap and went fast asleep.

When they awoke they were in a marble palace. The floors were covered with gold carpet. Columns, so big three people couldn't put their arms around them, stretched to ceiling that seemed half a mile away. Wreaths of holly decorated the walls and there was a giant Christmas tree, glittering with stars, in the center of the room. A 50-piece orchestra sat at the side of the room. As the children gazed in wonder, the orchestra struck up and a host of fairy creatures strolled into the room and began to dance.

The most beautiful creature of all clapped her hands. The music stopped and the beautiful one said, "It is now past 12 and Christmas Eve. I, the Fairy Queen declare that we shall feast and dance for two whole days and nights and this will be the gayest Christmas ever!"

Everyone cheered but before the music could start again Jeremy plunged through the crowd. "Oh, your majesty, you've got to do something quickly!" he cried.

The Queen looked at him in astonishment as he blurted out the whole story of how Nog was Santa now and Santa was an old woman in the Haunted House and it was up to the Queen to break the charm.

"You must break it right away," finished Jeremy, "or it will be too late."

The Queen turned pale and her hands fluttered wildly. "Yes, yes," he moaned. "But there are three things I must have to break the charm; something gold, something pearl and something invisible."

"Done!" said the Prince at her wide. "There are plenty such things around."

"But you see," said the Queen. "They must be real and not things from fairyland at all."

"Then we are lost," cried the prince. "For there is no time to search these things down."

Then all the fairy creatures sorrowed and the Queen was the most sorrowful of all.



Take three giant steps down Red Cow Path.
There you will find a chestnut tree

Chapter 17

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL

All seemed lost. How was it possible to find something gold and something pearl and something invisible - all real and not from fairyland - in time for the Queer to save Santa Land from Nog?

It just couldn't be done and all the joy had gone from the fairies' Christmas party. The Queen sat disconsolate on her red velvet throne surrounded by gloomy princes and tearful maids in waiting. The orchestra put down its violins and the walls.

Sissy, who had been hiding behind Jeremy's back all this time, came forward and curtsied to the Queen. "Your Majesty," she said shyly. "I have something gold."

"What is it, my dear?" asked the Queen kindly.

Sissy reached up and touched her golden hair. "Would this do?"

The Queen looked at her in wonder and a smile lit her face. "Of course!" she exclaimed and she called for scissors and cut a golden curl from Sissy's head.

When it was done Jeremy reached hesitantly into his pocket and said, "Would this be something pearl?" He held the tooth he'd lost when he fell from the tree.

"The very thing!" cried the Queen. She took Jeremy's pearly tooth and laid it beside Sissy's golden curl

Miss Jo had crept to the side of the throne to stare in speechless love at the beautiful Queen. Suddenly she could contain herself no longer. She rose on tip-toe and laid a kiss on the Fairy Queen's cheek

The Queen's hand flew to her cheek, her eyes glistened and her whole face shone with joy.

"The kiss is invisible" cried the Prince on her side. "Now the charm can be broken."

The Queen rose and waved her wand. "The charm of the purple stone is now broken!" she declared. "Nog shall be Nog and Santa will be Santa as they were"

The orchestra struck up and the dancers laughed and shouted and whirled about. The Queen gathered the children to her and said, "Let us hasten to Santa Land!" The children followed her from the palace into a fairy chariot and soared away once more to the far-away land of never-ending snow.

When they reached there they found Santa himself standing beside his sleigh. In the sleigh was purple-faced, hairless, toothless, bottle-shaped Nog all ready to take off with a bag full of trouble for all the children in the world.

"You can't do it, Nog" said the Queen. "It's too late."

Nog held up the purple stone and said furiously, "But I can. I can turn anybody into anything with this stone and before I'm done I shall turn you into a bottle of glue!"

"The charm of the purple stone is broken," said the Queen. "But I have a charm of my own, and I now turn you into a

rocking chair to sit in the Haunted House on Burning Tree Road and rock forevermore!"

She waved her wand and Nog vanished from the sleigh. Then Santa threw Nog's bag of horrors from the sleigh and loaded it with his own bags filled with all good things. On top of it all he put Jeremy, Sissy and Miss Jo.

"When we get to your home," said Santa, "You shall pick out a whole bag each for your very own. And I'll tell the whole wide world if three little children hadn't believed the Storyteller's story there wouldn't be Christmas anywhere for anyone tonight."

The sleigh rose in the darkened sky. The Fairy Queen waved and Jeremy, Sissy and Miss Jo "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" and Santa, all rosy and plump, cried, "Merry Christmas to All!"



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