

If you need a little Christmas, the true meaning of Christmas, reach out and help less fortunate families have a presents to open or a dinner for Christmas. We all need an Angel help others believe in something.

A Strange Christmas Angel

I confess at once the strangeness of my angel. I grant that not one person in the world, looking on him, would have thought of an angel. Angels have beautiful faces; but his face-well, though not bad-looking, was certainly not beautiful. His head was too big for his body, and he had bushy eyebrows; and though his nose was good, yet his mouth was rather large. Still, this was not a real drawback, because his teeth were white and regular, and his smile was almost beautiful. Indeed, the face, taken as a whole, wore an attractive expression which seemed to have its source in two gentle brown eyes. They were such eyes as have known much suffering and are come to be conscious of its Divine secret.

One could go on in this way balancing his good and bad points, excusing one feature by another, and after all no one would imagine he had any claim to be an angel. Besides, angels have wings, and robes of light encircling graceful forms; but my angel had a pair of crutches which pushed up his shoulders, and a humpback which sent down his head between them. Last of all, his legs were bent with thinness and weakness (alas! they were not nourished well from the spine), and they seemed to interlock each other and get into each other's way as with a kind of swing he made slow and painful progress.

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With regard to his clothes, graceful is not the word to use in describing them any more than in describing his form. A hump and high shoulders do not make easy work for the tailor. The most successful artiste in clothes could not have made his coat hang gracefully, whilst his trousers, poor fellow, were perfectly

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Think of our nominal birthday boy this year. If anyone can have compassion on people who are plagued with holiday blues, it certainly must be Jesus on His birthday. This year, let Him be the guest of honor at your party.

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hopeless, wrapping round his crooked legs in wrinkles from top to bottom.

Lastly, one other thing alone would have made it perfectly impossible to have confounded him with an angel-he always wore a chimneypot hat whenever he went abroad. Perhaps he thought it added distinction to his appearance and dignity to his height. Few men are without their weakness, and, angel though he was, he had a great deal of the human in him, as is evident from this description. I know that he was keenly alive to the opinion of those around him, as most deformed ones are, and perhaps it grew out of that feeling. Believe me, deformity does not blunt sensibility, as some appear to think; on the contrary, it usually makes it even morbidly painful in respect of observation.

But if in his person he suggested nothing of the angelic, neither did his abode. Founder's Yard in Southwark had little that was heavenly about it, except the sky, to any casual glance.

It lay at the end of a narrow, dark passage which led up to it out of a poverty-stricken street. A bit of Old London survived in it, though of a very humble kind. Once there had been a blacksmith's forge here, in days long gone, when the yard was open to a highway. The blacksmith's cottage and workshop still remained in outward form, though everything within and around had completely changed. Now two high blank walls of brick shut it in at its ends, and the back parts of the houses, whose fronts were in the street already referred to, rose up before it grim and decayed.

Four Tier Christmas Dessert Tower



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It was this ancient blacksmith's house which was the abode of my strange angel. The old shop he used as a kind of warehouse or store-place, his occupation being that of a rag-and-bone and odds-and-ends collector, which he varied. However, by a turn now and then at carving toys, partly for sale at shops, and partly for exchange in his business. From time to time a curious old article would come his way, and this he would take to the shops which dealt in antiquities. Occasionally, too, he would get a commission from friendly shopkeepers to attend sales and pick up whatever he could which seemed odd or choice. In this way he made a better livelihood than one would imagine possible at first sight of him. It was indeed a poor one at the best, and many a pinching time he knew; but if you had asked him, he would have told you that he considered himself a most fortunate man to possess a house of his own, and to have his bread sure and his water sure. It is not this or that which

makes us rich: it is a thankful spirit to enjoy and make the most of what we have.

But now for my story. It is the morning of Christmas Eve, if I may venture to use such an Irish expression; my strange angel is in his store, evidently full of thought; there is some project in his mind, for he stands leaning on his crutches, stroking his chin and looking up and down his accumulated rubbish, and he says once or twice over in a musing tone, 'I think I can make it do. We will be in great force on Christmas night, please God,' As he thus soliloquizes, his sweet smile breaks over his face, while he strokes his chin; and could we have seen into his thoughts, I believe we should all have agreed that in that smile, at least, something of the angel gleamed out.

'I must be off to the market,' he said, 'or I shall never get all I want;' and he turned and went to the door of his house.

Some one within evidently heard the sound of his approach, for a soft treble voice cried out, 'Uncle Bob!'

'Yes, dear,' he answered. 'I am going down the street for awhile; but I will be back as soon as I can. I am only going to buy what is needed for our party.'

'Oh, do come in for a moment and tell me all you mean to buy, Uncle Bob. I can't rest unless you do;' and a pair of eager eyes looking out of a pale but pretty face flashed up at him as soon as he stood inside the door.

He gave back a full smile to their little owner, who was lying on an old couch in the corner, evidently an invalid.

'But it is my great secret, child. Won't you let me have a secret for once?'

'I do so like to know what you are doing, Uncle Bob, when you are away from me j but if you had rather not tell, why--'

'Why, child,' he said, interrupting her sorrowful tone, , I thought to give you more pleasure by letting the things come in quite promiscuous and unexpected, and I have been thinking of your delight as they come in j but perhaps you may imagine more than the reality, and then you would be disappointed, and that wouldn't do at all. So I must needs tell you, I suppose.'

Whereupon he seated himself at the end of the couch, and began an enumeration of his intended purchases. Evidently his intentions seemed something extraordinary to the little invalid, for her eyes got brighter as he went on, and at the mention of each fresh article she clapped her hands with glee and excitement.

'Three dozen buns, three dozen oranges, three dozen bags of sweets, and three or four pounds of chestnuts,' he said, counting slowly on his fingers, as if it were a tremendous effort to remember all.

'Oh, uncle,' she cried, 'how happy all the boys will be this Christmas!'

'Do you think it will be enough?' he asked, as if her opinion was of the greatest importance. , Hadn't we, perhaps) better have some bread and cheese and plum-loaf as well for them to begin with?'

'Perhaps,' she said quite gravely; 'for, you know, they might be very hungry when they come in, and if they were they wouldn't enjoy the magic lantern so much as we should like.'

'That is just what I was thinking,' he replied, and so we will try and get the cheese and plum-loaf too.'

'But, Uncle Bob,' the child said in a hesitating way, 'won't it cost a great deal of money?'

'Heaps! Heaps!' he said; 'but never mind that. God has been very good to me, and I have had a windfall or two of late. I think the Good Father knew that we wanted this treat, and so He has sent us sufficient for it.'

'I do wish I was strong, to help you more, she said, squeezing his hand with her small, delicate fingers.

'Nay, nay, little one, don't fret,' he answered. , We are both of us as God has made us, and no doubt He can get most out of us just as we are. Don't let us forget that the Good Father doesn't want our strength: He wants our love.'

As he said this he raised himself from the sofa, and kissing her wistful, upturned face, which had intelligence in it older than her years, he took his departure, casting on her from the doorway a reassuring smile.

'Dear Uncle Bob!' she said to herself; 'how kind he is! He always calls God the "Good Father." He must be good if He's better than Uncle Bob.'

It was about ten o'clock, and before eleven had struck the parcels begun to arrive one after the other. First came the oranges, for which she had to get her very largest tray. Next came the buns, for which she could do no better than make a clean place on the table. She grew quite in despair about the accommodation of the plum-loaf and cheese when they should arrive, after she had arranged the bags of sweets and the huge parcel of nuts. At length she sat down quite overcome with the sight of so much abundance, and her thoughts grew full of the happiness of the boys who were to be the recipients of it all. She was quite sure not one of them would ever have seen, except in shop windows, so many good things; and she fell to imagining how she would have them brought out one by one. Each fresh gift should come as a surprise, and wouldn't they think Uncle Bob a good, great man!

As she thought in this way about the boys and her Uncle Bob, and as her heart went out in such simple feelings of love and kindness, I do not think that any lady in all London, however great her state might be, was happier than the little invalid. For it is not the things outside us which make us happy: it is the purity and the sweetness and the kindness of the emotions which pass through our hearts. This is why they who love to do well are always the most truly happy.

But now one thing arrived which surprised her beyond all words. It was a beautiful little tree - a real tree - wide at the bottom and tapering towards the top. She did not know it was a young fir, and she wondered much whatever it could be for. Evidently Uncle Bob had not told her all, and she felt glad now that there was a secret which had still to be revealed. She thought she knew all about the oranges and nuts, and

therefore she could delight in them as she imagined the gladness of the boys who were to receive them; but this unknown tree was quite beyond her imagination.

It was not until nearly one o'clock that Uncle Bob arrived to answer the all-important question which filled the little maiden's mind, 'What is it for?' When, however, he did arrive, he was a perfect tease. For not only would he not answer, and kept on saying, 'You will see,' all the time they eat their dinner, but he had brought with him also some mysterious packages, about which he would say only the same stupid words, and which he put on a shelf out of reach. He did vouchsafe at last to tell her that the packages had something to do with the tree, but that only made her curiosity the greater; and he kept on saying, as if to himself, 'Won't we be in great force! Won't dear little "Impatience" quite boil over with pleasure when I tell her! '

'Dear Uncle Bob, do tell me now; I'm only a little girl, you know.'

'Well, then, I'll whisper,' he said. "It's something you and I have got to make to grow beautiful and rich with all sorts of things for Christmas night. When Mrs. Jones and I have made the shop ready, and I've fixed up the magic lantern, then you and I will begin on the tree.'

How bewitching is a little mystery of love! How delicious its unfolding!