"*Th-th-r-r-roo-hee-hoo-hoo,*" went the second more mellow little bell.

"*Tree-hee, throo-hoo; tree-hee-hee, throo-hoo-hoo,*" they now went, both together.

Then the second little bell became a little human voice. "They think we are asleep!" it said, still under the blankets.

"They fink we 's athleep!" said the first little bell, also still under the blankets.

"*Tr-r-ee-hee-hee-hee, thr-r-oo-hoo-hoo-hoo.*" This time the sound was clear. The blankets had been thrown off.

But if the blankets were off, the night remained. "It 's *awful* dark," said one of the voices.

"I got the candle all ready," said the other. "It 's in the lowest drawer, under the towels, where we can find it."

"Then light it."

"It *is awful* dark, is n't it?"

"Light it!" repeated the littlest voice; and there was a movement, as of some impatient elbow nudging a sensitive rib.

A body slid down the side of the bed, bare feet thumped to the floor; there was a fumbling within the dresser, the crackle of a match. Upon the night-table a light glowed, lighting Elizabeth's head, throwing gold upon gold.

"Now, come back to bed, quick!" called Maryan. She never liked to be left alone in bed.

Elizabeth leaped back, knelt, facing her pillow, and raised it till it stood up straight against the back of the bed. Then, with an adroit movement, without letting it fall down, she turned and sat up against it.

Maryan tried to imitate her sister. But her knees not being sharp like Elizabeth's, but round, she slipped and went head-first into the pillow, while the lower part of her rose in the attitude of a tumble-bug. With help, though, she righted herself and, panting, achieved Elizabeth's position. The little girls now sat upright in bed, side by side. The expression on their faces was that of a kitten which had just lapped cream. They looked at each other, and sniggled. Then their eyes turned to the big fire-place and remained there. Maryan's left hand slid along the counterpane; Elizabeth's right slid toward it; they met and clasped.

"Do you think he 'll come?" asked Maryan, after a while.

"Of course. Is n't it Christmas, and are n't the shoes all ready?"

"Will he be pretty and soft, like in the picture?"

"Of course."

"But how will he come?"

"Down the chimney."

"But how down the chimney?"

"Down the chimney; how do you suppose?"

"In a sleigh?"

"No-o; that 's old Santa Claus does that."

"Then how?"

"Oh, he 'll come all right!"

Silence. They stared solemnly at the fire-place. But Maryan was not good at waiting.

"Will his mamma be with him?"

"No, goosie."

"Why?"

"Well, he has to have his breakfast when he gets back, does n't he? Who 'd have his breakfast ready, if his mamma was n't there!"

"Then she stays home?"

"Yes."

"In heaven?"

"Of course."

"But 'Lisbeth, how does he come?"

"Oh, Maryan, I told you already!"

"Will he fly down?"

"Maybe."

"He 's got little wings, has n't he?"

"No, goosie. That 's Cupid. And the little angels what 's got only heads."

"Then how?"

"Oh, Maryan, you make me nervous!"

"But how will he come *down?*"

"Oh, he 's got an aeroplane. A little toy aeroplane what buzzes."

"Ain't that cute!"

"Yes, but you must n't talk any more. Else he won't come at all, at all."

"I 'll keep still."

They were silent, looking steadily at the fire-place. Before them, on the white counterpane, their hands lay clasped; above, their yellow curls mingled.

A strange thing began to happen. The fire-place began to go away. It would go away, then suddenly come back; go away and come back, go away and come back. Finally, it went away, without coming back.

The big blue eyes saw nothing now. And seeing nothing, very sensibly, they closed.

Between the golden heads, a crack slowly appeared. It grew. One small head was sliding to the left, the other small head was slipping to the right. The separation quickened; there was a sudden divergent rush, and two white-robed little bodies sprawled across the bed, like two dolls who should have fought to a mutual knock-out.

The candle spluttered. Its small flame went up and down, as though it were winking.

It was thus that Father and Mother found the room an hour later. Father entered first. He said: "The little devils! Look! The lit-tle dev-vils!"

"Did you ever!" said Mother. "Did you ever!"

"A candle," growled Father, pointing to the taper, which had quickly assumed at their entrance an expression of having seen nothing.

"*That's* Miss Elizabeth!" said Mother.

Father took Maryan by the leg, and drew her down to her right place in bed. With Elizabeth, who was not so chubby, and hence slept less soundly, more precaution had to be taken; but at last they were both sleeping in position, the covers up to their chins.

"What now?" asked Father.

"Put out the light; it will be safer."

The candle was blown out, and also the lamp. Then, in the dark, Father and Mother worked mysteriously. They went out and came in; they fumbled about the hearth. Their steps were a-tiptoe; their words were murmurs. But, in the obscurity and the silence, several times there were odd disturbances. A *ba-a-a* of baby sheep; a queer, flat voice saying, "pa-pa, ma-ma"; an abrupt whirr as of a clock running down, and a sweet jangle of little bells. At each accident, Father and Mother were petrified for several moments into complete immobility.

Finally, the door was closed, and they were again alone in the desert hall-way. And again, as if feeling lonely there, Mother threw herself upon Father's sturdy frame. "Oh, Frank," she said, "if little Harold were only here!"

"Yes, dear, yes, dear," said Father, petting her.

"He 'd be ten years old now. Ten!"

"He 's an angel," said Father.

And holding each other close, they went on down the hall. A light flared, a door shut; a silence that seemed definite flowed slowly through the house.

Above, upon the roof, the snow was coming down steadily in large, humid flakes; here and there it melted, leaving small spots that glistened vaguely. The clouds were very low; they seemed almost within the reach of an upraised hand. They passed swiftly, sulphur-hued, and, tearing at times, gave a rapid glimpse of a hurrying moon, tenuous as a volute of green vapor.

At the Louvre

To the right and the left, other roofs stretched, covered with white; spots of melted snow looked like pools. And myriads of chimneys, some high some low, some round, some square, made about these pools a fantastic and gesticulating forest of small, mad, twigless trees.

Along this artificial sierra, through the stiff and stunted landscape, two human forms came gliding from the south. They slid, they crawled, they leaped, they made sudden shadowy rushes; they sprang across chasms like flying squirrels, and lit on all-fours as on padded paws, their bodies tight as rubber-balls.

The leader was a man. The vizor of his cap was pulled down even with his brow; rope sandals were on his feet; and within his closely buttoned jacket, his squat body had a feline and disquieting resiliency. A red handkerchief, knotted about his neck, made him sinister. His movements were precise and unerring, and his eyes were sharp and quick as a ferret's.

The second was a small boy, thin as a gutter-cat. He followed the man closely, leaping as he leaped, crawling as he crawled, placing his right hand here, his left knee there, imitating each gesture with a fidelity that gave him the appearance of one of those touching little monkeys one sees at a circus, secretly tied to their crafty trainer by an invisible and inexorable chain. Twice, though, he stopped suddenly and clung convulsively with elbows, feet and nails, while his eyes, going wild, plunged along the precipitous slope beneath him. The first time, a sharp ejaculation of his leader sufficed to start him on again; the second time, the leader's hand came down upon his shoulder with a heavy, pinching grip.

They were at length upon the slate roof beneath which Elizabeth and Maryan were sleeping. They made for the rectangular masonry of the big chimney and stood up against it. The man's eyes were just even with its top.

"This is the place," he said. His voice had no resonance. "That's the flue down which you go."

The boy shrunk small. He was a thin little boy, and the wrist of the arm he held against the chimney was red and crevassed with cold.

"Tighten your belt," said the man.

The boy had a broad belt about his waist; sewed

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Mother had answered: "I 'll be the trained nurse"