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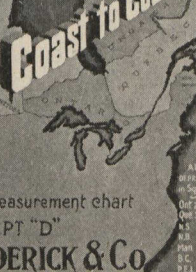
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THE PERRIWINKLES CHRISTMAS

"MY stars and popguns!" exclaimed Santa Claus, slapping his knee soundly, "but this has been a busy Christmas; never knew there were so many children in the world. I tell you, it makes me feel good." And his cheeks glowed and his eyes danced with their kindly and gleeful light. "Come Blinken! Come Blitzen!" he cried, slapping the reins joyfully, "we have not been to the Perriwinkles yet. Nice youngsters, those Perriwinkles are, mustn't forget them." And with a jingle of bells his magic sled disappeared into the night.

There had been great preparation and excitement in the Perriwinkle household on this wonderful night of Christmas Eve.

"Bobby, do come here," said Betty, the oldest Perriwinkle, sitting back on her heels in front of the fireplace, and gazing thoughtfully at the assorted row of stockings hung there. "Bobby, I was wondering what we ought to do about the twins. Last Christmas, you know, they weren't here, and Santa Claus might think it was queer if he came and found five stockings instead of three. If you had let me write and tell him about them as I wanted to, it would have been all right, but now you see, he will come all the way down that old chimney with just enough toys for Molly and you and me and when he sees five stockings he'll have to go all the way back again to get a fresh supply for the twins."

Bob was swinging himself to and fro on the foot of Betty's bed and looking very disconsolate. Suddenly he wheeled around.

"I've got a scheme, Bet!" he exclaimed. "You go and write your letter now and I'll see that he gets it before he comes down that chimney or my name is not Robert Harrington Perriwinkle."

Betty's eyes sparkled. "How will you do it?" she asked.

"I had better not tell you," said Bob importantly, "you might give the scheme away."

Betty wasn't quite sure that everything was all right, but she didn't see any other way out of the difficulty, so she ran off to do her share and soon came back, with a neat little envelope addressed in her round handwriting to "Santa Claus, Perriwinkles' Chimney, Morden Street," and down in the corner she had generously added, "Kindness of my Brother Bob."

Bob took it and tucked it deep down in his coat pocket. "Well, so long," he said. "I guess I'll be back in about half an hour."

"Aren't you going to tell?" wheedled Betty, looking at him out of the corner of her eye.

"When I get back," said Bob, firmly. "Now you must shut this door and after you have counted one hundred slowly, then you can open it, but you must not try to follow me. I'll bet you'll think it great fun when I tell you. Good-bye," and he was gone.

After shutting the door he ran noiselessly down the hall to the back of the house and up the long flight of stairs that led to the flat above where the cook and the nurse slept, and where the trunk and store-rooms were. One of these, a trunk-room, had a large window in it, and it was by means of this room and this window that Bobby intended to accomplish his great "scheme." He stepped in and shut the door quietly, and by climbing upon a trunk managed to turn on the one light that hung in the centre of the room. He had some trouble unfastening the stiff catch of the window, but after that everything was easy, and climbing over the sill he had soon slipped to the flat roof that stretched some five feet beneath. The bright moon shining on the sparkling snow made it almost like daylight, and our brave Bobby felt no whit of fear as he waded forward.

"It's higher than I expected," thought Bobby, trying vainly to reach to the top. "Now if I pin the letter low down maybe he won't see it at all. I wanted it right on top where he couldn't miss it, but I guess I'm not tall enough. I'll run back and get something from the trunk-room to stand on, that's the best thing to do." And he waded slowly back to the open window. My poor, brave Bobby, your little legs are too short again, and the window is a foot out of your reach. Here was a nice kettle of fish, and no way out of it, either. Bobby stood on his tip-toes and stretched his arms up as far as they would go, but it was no use. He tried jumping up, but the sill seemed to slip away from him. He turned and looked at the big shining moon, but it only seemed to wink back at him as much as to say, "Now see what you have done." So he turned his back on it and tried to think of some way out of his trouble. Maybe Bridget would notice the light and come in and find the window open. There was a sound in the room even now, as if somebody was in there, perhaps coming to the window. "Bridget! Bridget!" he shouted loudly, wildly. The window slammed shut. "O wirra! wirra! 'tis the devil hisself!" Bobby heard her exclaim, as she always did when anything frightened her, and then her heavy footfall running from the room, and he was alone again.

It seemed like hours to frightened, lonely little Bobby before he heard a voice again at the window saying sternly, "Who is out there?" "It's me, Daddy, me—Bobby; please come and take me," and holding up his arms he was lifted gently into the lighted room where the astonished Bridget gathered him into her strong arms.

Of course Daddy had to be told the whole "scheme," and although he talked pretty severely to Bobby for doing such a reckless thing and made him promise never, never to go climbing on roofs again, still he didn't seem too very angry.

Down in the nursery everything was still. Bob undressed quickly, said his prayers, and slipped into bed.

"Bobby!" A whisper came from Betty's bed. "You were an awful long time. Sit up and tell me about it."

So he whispered the whole story to her sitting up there in the dark while Molly slept peacefully in her bed between them. When he had finished Betty heaved a big sigh. "My, but you were brave!" she said; "that's 'cause you are a boy. I wish I was a boy." Then, "But did you leave the letter?"

"Gemmeni cracks!" exclaimed the hero, remorsefully, "it's still in my coat pocket. The twins won't get anything after all."

"Well, never mind," said Betty, "you did your best, and maybe Santa will know anyway."

If you had seen a pair of bulgy, bursting, little twin Perriwinkle stockings hanging in the old fireplace on Christmas morning you would have guessed that "Santa knew anyway."

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