

cl, Hiram whispered to Aunt Ellen:
 "I'm glad it's a big stocking. One
 'll do for both of 'em."

It was late when they all went to bed, and there was so much fire in the fire-place they were half afraid to leave it, but Grandfather Vrooman said it was of no use to try and cover it up, and the room would be warm in the morning.

When they got upstairs the children must all have been asleep, for there was not a sound from any room, and the older people went to bed on tiptoe, and they had tried hard to not so much as whisper on the stairs.

CHAPTER III.

Oh, how beautiful the country was when the gray dawn came next morning!—white and still in the dim and growing light.

So still! But the stillest place was the one Bijah woke up in. He could not guess where he was at first, but he lay awhile and remembered.

"Santa Claus' house, and they're all real good. He's going to give me to somebody as soon as it's Christmas."

He got up very quickly and looked around him. It was not dark in the store-room, for there was a great square hole in the middle of the floor, and a glow of dull red light came up through it which almost made Bijah feel afraid.

There was his little gray suit of clothes, cap and all, close by his bed on the floor, and he put them on faster than he ever had done it before.

"Where's my other stocking?"

He searched and searched, but it was of no use. and he said, "I can't run away in the snow with a bare foot."

He had been getting braver and braver, now he was wide awake, and he crawled forward and looked down the scuttle-hole. He knew that room in a minute, but he had to look twice before he knew the tree.

"Ever so many stockings! And they're all full. Look at those sleds! Oh my!"

Whichever way he looked he saw something wonderful, and he began to get excited.

"I can climb down. It's just like going downstairs."

It was just about as safe and easy, with all those branches under him, and all he had to do was to sit on one, and get ready to sit on the next one below him. He got about half way down, and

there was the grain bag, with its mouth wide open. Just beyond it on the same bough, but further out, there hung a very small stocking indeed.

"That's mine!" exclaimed Bijah. "It's cram full, too. They've borrowed it, after all theirs were full. I want it to put on now, but I can't reach it out there."

Just then he began to hear noises upstairs, and other noises in the rooms below—shouts and stamping, and people calling to one another—and he could not make out what they were saying.

"Oh, dear! they're coming. Santa Claus is coming. What 'll I do?"

Bijah was scared; but there was the wide mouth of Grandfather Vrooman's grain-bag "stocking," and almost before Bijah knew what he was doing he had slipped in.

Poor Bijah! The moment he was in he discovered that he could not climb out. He tried hard, but there was nothing on the sides of the bag for his feet to climb on. Next moment, too, he wanted to crouch down as low as he could, for all the noise seemed to be coming nearer.

So it was, indeed, and at the head of it were grandfather and grandmother and the other grown-up people, trying to keep back the boys and girls until they should all be gathered.

"Where's Bijah?" asked grandfather, after he had counted twice around, and was sure about the rest.

"Bijah!" exclaimed Liza. "Why, I looked in the store-room; he isn't there."

"Hope the little chap didn't get scared and run away."

"Dear me—through the snow!" exclaimed grandmother.

"Of course not," said Aunt Jane. "He's around somewhere. Let's let the children in. They're all here."

"Steady, now!" said grandfather, as he swung open the door into the "dark room." "Don't touch anything till we all get in. Stand around the tree."

He himself stepped right in front of it, and he looked more like a great tall, old Santa Claus than ever as he stood there. The children's eyes were opening wider and wider as they slipped around in a sort of very impatient circle; but grandfather's own eyes shut for a moment, as they had a habit of doing sometimes, and his white beard was all of a tremble. It was only for a moment, but when he looked around again he said: