

blue time of it if it hadn't been for Liph and Bush. It had somehow got into Bush's mind that the dot in gray was under his protection, and he followed Bijah from one corner to another.

All the doors in the "dark room" were open, and it was the lightest room in the house, with its big fire on the hearth and all the lamps that were taken in after supper; but there was not one thing hanging on the Christmas tree until Grandfather Vrooman exclaimed:

"Now for stockings! It's getting late, children. I must have you all in bed before long."

"Stockings?"

They all knew what that meant, and so did Bijah, but it was wonderful how many that tree had to carry. Bob Hopkins insisted on hanging two pairs for himself, and Thad Simpson was begging his mother for a second pair, when Liph Hardy came in from the kitchen with a great, long, empty grain bag.

"What in the world is that for?" asked grandmother, perfectly astonished. "Why, child, what do you mean by bringing that thing in here?"

"One big stocking for grandfather. Let's hang it up, boys. Maybe Santa Claus 'll come and fill it."

There was no end of fun over Grandfather Vrooman's grain bag stocking, that was all leg and no foot, but Uncle Hiram Simpson took it and fastened it strongly to a branch in the middle of the tree. It was close to the trunk, and was almost hidden; but Liph saw Uncle Hiram wink at Aunt Ellen, and he knew there was fun of some kind that he had not thought of.

Grandmother Vrooman had been so busy with all those children from the moment they came into the house that she had almost lost her anxiety; but it came back to her now all of a sudden.

"Sakes alive! Jane," she said to Mrs. Hardy, "every last one of 'em's got to be in bed before we can do a thing with the stockings."

Bijah heard her, for he was just beyond the dining-room door, with a cruller in each hand, and it made him shiver all over.

"I wish I was in the 'sylum. No, I don't either, but I kind o' wish I was."

Bijah was a very small boy, and he had not seen much of the world, but his ideas were almost as clear as those of the other children, and Grandmoth-

er Vrooman for the next fifteen minutes. The way the Simpson and Hopkins families got mixed up, with Liph and Sue Hardy to help them, was something wonderful. Old Bush wandered from room to room after them, wagging his tail and whining.

"Mother," exclaimed Mrs. Hardy at last, "the bed you made on the floor in the store-room!"

"Just the thing for him. All the rest go in pairs. I'll put that poor little dear right in there."

So she did, and not one of her own grand-children was tucked in warmer than was Bijah. He did not kick the bedclothes off next minute, either, and he was the only child in the house of whom that could be said. Grandfather Vrooman paid a visit of inspection all around from room to room, and Bush went with him. It took him a good while. When he came to the store-room and looked in, Bijah's tired eyes were already closed as tight as were the fingers of the little hand on the coverlet, which was still grasping a cruller.

He was fast asleep, but Grandfather Vrooman was not; and yet, when Bush looked up at him, the old man's eyes were shut too, and there was a stir in his thick white beard as if his lips were moving.

Things got pretty still after a while, and then there began a steady procession in and out of the "dark room," which was not dark.

Boxes went in, and bundles, and these were opened and untied, and their contents spread out and looked at and distributed. It was no wonder Grandfather Vrooman's big sleigh had been so full, and the one Pat had driven, when they brought the Hopkins and Simpson families from the north and south railway stations.

Grandfather himself went away out to the barn once for something he said he had hidden there, and while he was gone Aunt Ellen Simpson and Uncle Hiram slipped a package into the grain bag, and grandmother handed Uncle Hiram another to slip in on top of it, and Uncle John Hardy and Uncle Martin Hopkins each handed him another, and the bag was almost half full, but you could not see it from outside; and then they all winked at each other when grandfather came in with a back-load of sleds. Grandmother may have thought she knew what they were winking about, but she didn't, for Un-