

"Oh, you did? Yes, a boy of course! I might have known it was a boy. Can't stop to talk. Got miles and miles to ride. Call around day after to-morrow if you want anything."

"I only want to ask you—"

"Yes, yes, I know. You want to ask about presents. It's all right, all right. List all made out. Goods packed and labelled. Couldn't change anything now. Run right home and go to bed, that's a good lad."

"I haven't any home," said Chubby; "I'm going to sleep in the crate, back o' the lamp store, and I just wanted a hitch, that's all, sir."

"A hitch! That's a fine idea! Why your sled would be smashed to pieces, and your neck broken, in no time. What's your name?"

"Chubby Ruff."

"Tisn't on my list, that's a fact. Haven't any home, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Wish I'd brought one or two along, I declare. I'd give you one in a minute. Well, jump in here. I'll give you a ride, anyway."

"What shall I do with my sled?" asked Chubby.

"Put it in the magic box," And Santa lifted up the velvet cushion of the seat. "See there!" said he. Chubby looked in and saw a deep box full of miniature Christmas presents. There were rocking-horses of the size of a baby's thumb; and dolls no bigger than pin heads, and tops, balls, books, games, candies, suits of clothes—everything you could think of—but all so very little!

"That's the way I carry my load," said Santa. "When I put anything in there it shrinks right up. When I take it out again it is as big as ever." And sure enough he dropped in Chubby's sled, and it changed in an instant to the size of your little finger nail.

"Now we're off," said he. "Tsit!"

The reindeers gave a bound, and up they went, sleigh, Santa, Chubby and all, to the roof of the nearest house. Santa filled his pack from the magic box, and disappeared down a chimney. In a quarter of a minute out he popped again, like a jumping jack out of his box, leaped into his sleigh, hissed to his team, and with one spring they had cleared the street and landed in the next block.

And so he went on with his work.

The magic box seemed to be inexhaustible. Santa Claus filled his pack from it hundreds of times, until, as he told Chubby, he had taken forty-seven ear-loads of presents from it. He would reach in and pick up a little mite of a thing—a tip cart, perhaps, or a drum—that he could hold between his thumb and finger, when, presto! the instant it came out of the box it would be as big as ever. Chubby never grew tired of watching these changes, and often laughed outright to see what looked like a wooden mosquito suddenly swell out into a wooden ox or an elephant.

Sometimes as Santa was loading his pack, he would tell Chubby who the different gifts were for, and what sort of people they were. And Chubby was greatly perplexed to find that many of the nicest things were for very naughty children, and that many of the most costly things were for the rich, who did not need them, while good boys and girls were often put off with a very meagre gift, and the poor, too, often with nothing at all. But when he asked Santa about it, the old man shook his head, and said that he couldn't go into that question then; that it had perplexed wiser folks than Chubby; and that he did not rightly understand it himself. The good Lord, he said, had seen fit to make some rich and some poor; and it was not for an old saint like him to try to undo his Master's work.

"Besides," added he, "you must understand that the true worth of these things is not the store-price of them, but the amount of happiness which they bring; and I have seen many a poor lad more pleased with a two-penny toy watch than many a rich man's son was with a gold one. Once," continued Santa, "when I was quite young and inexperienced—I think it was on my four hundredth or four hundred and first Christmas trip—I thought it would be a bright idea to equalize things a little. So I gave a diamond ring to an old apple

woman's son, and a penny whistle to a young millionaire. The police found the poor boy trying to sell his ring, and believing he must have stolen it, put him in prison. The young millionaire was so enraged at the meanness of his gift, that he got black in the face, fell down in a fit, and became an idiot. Since that," said Santa, "I never meddle with folks' circumstances, but just adapt myself to them."

"There is one other question I should like to ask," said Chubby.

"What is it?"

"I should like to know why your pack seems sometimes to be very light when there are heavy things in it, and very heavy when there are light things in it?"

"Now you have hit upon my greatest secret," said Santa.

"Oh, don't tell me if you would rather not," said Chubby.

"I don't mind telling you," Santa replied, "though I never mentioned it before. You see our sort of people have different weights and measures from what your sort of people have. Things are light and heavy to us, according to how much they are good for. Now, here is a package marked Sam Rothschild. It contains a chest of tools, a pair of skates, a croquet set, and so on—all what you would call heavy articles. But to me the whole concern doesn't weigh as much as a good sized goose-quill, because they will do that unhappy, discontented, unreasonable Sam no good at all. But here is a bundle marked Tommy Jones, containing a tippet and a pair of mittens knit by his grandmother, a new knife from his mother and a sugar heart from his little sister Meg; all what you would call light things, you see, yet they are so heavy to me that I fairly stagger under them, for I know they'll make Tom so happy that he can hardly contain himself. Why, it seems to me I'm carrying about five tons of happiness in that bundle."

And sure enough, Santa had all he could do to lift Tommy's presents into the pack, but tossed Sam's in as if they were so much thistle-down. After a night of hard work, Santa finished his task just before day-break. Chubby was glad to see the last load taken from the magic box, for he was getting tired and cold. Santa felt a little tired, too, as well he might; and the last load was a pretty heavy one, for they were in a neighborhood now where a great deal of happiness went with a present. Chubby noticed something more than fatigue in the old man's look as he came slowly back with his empty pack. He was troubled about something, that was plain.

"Did we take everything out of the magic box, Chubby?" he asked.

"Everything but my sled," said Chubby. "Don't you know we picked a violin and a pair of copper-toed shoes out of the crack in the left hand corner?"

"So we did," said Santa, "and fished that microscope out of the nail-hole on the right."

Yet he looked the box all over again, holding his lantern close down, and hunting every corner. There was nothing there but Chubby's sled.

"Have you lost anything?" said Chubby.

"No; but there's poor Phil, the lame boy in the next house. I wish I had brought something for him."

"I suppose he couldn't use a sled if he's lame?" said Chubby.

"Just the thing he wants. Then his big brother Jack could draw him to school. But we haven't one for him, that's clear."

"There's mine," said Chubby.

"What are you thinking of?" said Santa Claus.

"I was thinking," said Chubby, "of what Mr. Marsh said when he was so kind to me in the store. He said it was a time to do good for Jesus' sake, because Christmas was Jesus' birthday; and I should like to do some good for His sake; and I think He would like to have me give Phil the sled; and I would like to, too. It would be a real Christmas present, then; and I should like to see how it would be then."

Santa looked at Chubby for a moment with glistening eyes. Then he stooped and took the sled from the magic box. It was the heaviest load that he had carried that night, and Chubby saw how he staggered under it as he walked off with

it toward Phil's house. When he came back he walked very briskly, and the sober look was gone from his face.

"Chubby," said he, "would you like a home for a Christmas present?"

"I should like it very much if it was a good one," said Chubby.

Santa Claus took his seat and spoke to his reindeers. Off they went like a shot, through miles and miles of streets, turning corners, crossing bridges, never slackening their pace for an instant till they came to a handsome old mansion on the outskirts of the city. Here, at a "whish-sh-sh," from their master, they stopped still.

"This is the place," said Santa. "Climb into my pack."

Chubby climbed in.

"Am I very heavy?" he asked.

"As heavy as an elephant," said Santa. "I can't carry you. I'm glad of it, though; it's a sign they're going to like you."

"What shall I do then?"

"Carry yourself."

"Which way?"

"Up the rain-spout."

"Inside or outside?"

"Outside, of course. Follow me."

Santa climbed nimbly up, and Chubby followed him as well as he could; but when he had got about thirty feet from the ground his strength began to fail, and he felt sure he would have to drop. He looked up and saw Santa looking down at him over the edge of the roof.

"Climb a little higher," said he, "and you can reach my hand."

"I can't," said Chubby; and with that he woke up. It was broad daylight. Mike was taking down the shutters, and Mr. Marsh, who had just come in, stood by the stove looking down at Chubby.

"It was only a dream, after all," said Chubby, jumping up and rubbing his eyes.

"What was a dream?" asked Mr. Marsh. "Will you tell it to me?"

Chubby related the dream, and Mr. Marsh listened with great interest, all the while studying Chubby's face, and thinking very hard.

"There's stuff in him, that's clear," said the merchant to himself.

"What, sir?" said Chubby.

"Chubby," said Mr. Marsh, "do you like selling papers for a living?"

"It's the best I can do, sir."

"But suppose I could help you to do something better—to become a merchant, for instance?"

"I should like that very much, sir."

"Well, I've been thinking about it since last night, Chubby, and I have taken a notion that you might make a pretty fair merchant. If it would suit you, I'm—"

"Oh, it would suit me, sir, I'm sure."

"Well, then, I'll give you a place right here in my store."

"You're very kind, sir."

"That remains to be seen. I may be doing you a kindness, and I may be doing myself one; perhaps both; perhaps neither. We can tell better by and by."

And so after more talk than is necessary to relate, it was arranged that Chubby should become a clerk in the store; and better still, that he should, for the present at least, board in Mr. Marsh's family.

"And how about the sled?" asked Mr. Marsh.

"I think, sir," said Chubby, "that I would like to do as I did in the dream, and give it to somebody that needs it more than I do."

"Do you know such a one?"

"Oh, yes, sir. There's limping Peter, that used to belong to our club, and got run over by a dray. I shall give it to him."

And so Chubby Ruff's dream came true—the best part of it at least. He got a Christmas present of a home, and began his more prosperous life by doing a little good for Jesus' sake.

