

Bijah, with a quiver of his lip in spite of himself.

How they did chuckle when they tried to answer that question! All they made clear to Bijah was that the place for him was in a big chair before the sitting-room fire-place, with a plate of mince-pie in his lap, and Bush, the big house-dog, sitting beside him.

"It's Santa Claus' dog," said Bijah to himself; "but his house isn't as big as the 'sylum.'"

CHAPTER II.

There were fire-places in every room on the ground floor of Grandfather Vrooman's house and some kind of stove in more than half the rooms upstairs.

There were blazing fires on every hearth downstairs, and Liph got hold of Bijah after a while and made him and Bush go around with him to help poke them up. Bijah had never seen a fire-place before, and it was a great wonder to him, but Bush sat down in front of each fire and barked at it.

It was getting dark when they reached the great front parlor, and the fire-place there was wonderful.

"Woof, woof, woof," barked Bush.

Bijah stood still in the door while Liph went near enough to give that fire a poke, and he could hear Grandfather Vrooman away back in the sitting-room:

"Now, my dear, we'll stick him away somewhere. Put him in one of the stockings, and hang him up."

"That's me," groaned Bijah. "He's going to make a present of me to somebody. Oh, dear! I wish I could run away."

But he could not, for there was Liph and there was Bush, and it was getting dark.

"Now, my dear," went on grandfather, "I'll just light up, and then I'll go and meet that train. I'll bring Prue and her folks, and Pat'll meet the other, and bring Ellen and hers. Won't the old home be full this time?"

"He's caught some more somewhere," whispered Bijah to himself. "I wonder who'll get 'em? Who'll get me?"

That was an awful question, but Liph and Bush all but ran against him just then, and he heard grandmother say:

"You'll have to stick candles on the window-sills. I can't spare any lamps for upstairs."

"But, my dear, it's got to be lit up—

every room of it, I want 'em to know Christmas is going."

"That's what they were all saying at the 'sylum this morning,'" thought Bijah, "and here I am, right where it's coming to."

So he was, and he and Liph and Bush watched them finish setting the supper table, till suddenly Bush gave a great bark and sprang away toward the front door. Grandfather Vrooman had hardly been gone from the house an hour, and here he was, back again.

Jingle, jingle, jingle. How the sleigh-bells did dance as that great load of young folk came down the road, and what a racket they made at the gate, and how Bush and Liph, and grandmother, and the rest did help—

"He's caught 'em all," said Bijah, "but they ain't scared a bit."

No one would have thought so if they had seen Mrs. Prue Hopkins and her husband and her six children follow Grandfather Vrooman into the house.

They were hardly there, and some of them had their things on yet, when there came another jingle, and ever so much talking and laughter down the other road.

"He's caught some more. Some are little and some are big. I wonder who'll get the baby?"

Bush was making himself hoarse, and had to be spoken to by Mr. Hardy, while Mrs. Simpson tried to unmix her children from the Hopkinsons long enough to be sure none of them had dropped out of the sleigh on the road.

Then Liph set to work to introduce his cousins to Bijah, and Bush came and stood by his new friend in gray, to see that it was properly done.

"Where'd you come from?" said Joe Simpson.

"'Sylum," said Bijah. "Where'd he catch you?"

"Catch what?" said Joe, but Liph managed to choke off the chuckle he was going out, and to shout out:

"Why, Joe, we found him in the road to-day. He thinks grandfather's old Santa Claus, and this house is Christmas."

"So I am—so it is," said Grandfather Vrooman. "We'll make him hang up his stocking with all the rest to-night."

Bijah could not feel scared at all with so many children around him, and he was used to being among a crowd of them. Still, it was hard to feel at home after supper, and he might have had a