

But she had resolved never to know for the sake of the Present. Taking possession of it, she lightly touched the signature in the corner to her lips, and leaning forward, dropped it in the flames. The heart of oak should keep the secret to the end.

Two large, frightened gray eyes looked up quickly into her own, two little arms almost choked her in a loving embrace and a quivering little voice that tried to be brave whispered—"Don't mother, please don't cry, 'cause Laddie loves you still".

"Does he?" she whispered, looking into the eyes as like her own, "how do you know little one?"

"'Cause I does just, *awfully* and—oh, look mother, is it Santa Claus?"

Why did her very heart stand still and her brain cease to think? Was it a dream-picture of the Very Past or were things real? For in the door-way stood a form tall and strong and fair as a Viking, a veritable Prince of a Santa.

He was coming toward her, she could not rise—but, still clasping an awe-struck, curly-headed boy in her left arm she stretched her right hand toward the stranger, and all the pent-up longing love of a life, of a life to be in the Future, was in her voice as she said simply—"My two Laddies."

Was it a chuckle from the fire-place which broke the eloquent silence? But no; for there on the hearth lay a little black ember, dead.

'O?

