

THE CHRISTMAS PORRINGER



“THE STARTLED WONDER GREW IN HER
BLUE EYES AS SHE STARED DOWN AT THE
THINGS AT HER FEET.”

THE CHRISTMAS PORRINGER

BY

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with illustrations by

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To
my little friend
Alice Louise Moran

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CHAPTER I

Karen Asks About Christmas



OVER the old Flemish city of Bruges the wintry twilight was falling. The air was starry with snowflakes that drifted softly down, fluttering from off the steep brown roofs, piling up in corners of ancient doorways, and covering the cobblestones of the narrow streets with a fleecy carpet of white.

At a corner of one of the oldest of these and facing on another no wider than a lane, but which bore the name of The Little Street Of The Holy Ghost, a number of years ago there stood a quaint little house built of light yellow bricks. It had a steep gabled roof, the bricks that formed it being arranged in a row of points that met at the peak beneath a gilded weather-vane shaped like an arrow. The little house had no dooryard, and a wooden step led directly from its entrance to the flagstones that made a narrow, uneven walk along that side of the street.

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Icicles hung from the edge of the brown roof and twinkled in a crystal fringe around the canopy of the little shrine up in the corner of the dwelling. For, like so many others of the old city, the little house had its own shrine. It was a small niche painted a light blue, and in it, under a tiny projecting canopy of carved wood, stood a small figure of the Virgin Mother holding the Christ-child in her arms. Now and then a starry snowflake drifted in beneath the canopy and clung to the folds of the Virgin's blue robe or softly touched the little hands of the Christ-child nestling against her breast.

And, by and by, as the wind rose and blew around the corner of the house, it began to pile up the snow on the sills of the casement windows whose small panes of glass lighted the room within, where sat an old woman and a little girl. The woman was clad in a plain black gown, such as is still worn by the humbler of the Flemish dames, and on her silvery hair was a stiffly starched cap of white.

The little girl was dressed much the same, save that her light brown hair was not hidden but braided in two plaits that were crossed and pinned up very flat and tight at the back of her head.

The woman was bending over a rounded pillow, covered with black cloth, which she held in her lap; it was stuck full of stout pins, and around these was caught a web of fine threads each ending in a tiny bone bobbin, and beneath her skillful fingers, as they deftly plied these bobbins in and out, a delicate

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piece of lace was growing; for it was thus that she earned bread for herself and the little girl.

Indeed, the lace of Bruges, made by the patient toil of numberless of her poorer people, has for many centuries been famous for its fineness and beauty. And those who so gain their livelihood must often begin to work while they are still children, even as young as the little girl who sat there in the twilight by the window of the little yellow house.

She, too, was bending over a black-covered pillow, only hers was smaller and had fewer bobbins than that of the white-capped woman beside her; for the child was just beginning to learn some of the simpler stitches. But though the bit of lace on the pillow showed that she had made good progress, she was working now slowly and had already broken her thread twice, for her mind was full of other thoughts.

She was thinking that the next night would be Christmas eve, and that she would set her little wooden shoes by the hearth, and that if she had been good enough to please the Christ-child, he would come while she was asleep and put in them some red apples and nuts, or perhaps—perhaps he might bring the little string of beads she wanted so much. For Flemish children do not hang up their stockings for Santa Claus as do the children of our land, but instead, at Christmas time, they set their little shoes on the hearth and these they expect the Christ-child himself to fill with gifts.

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As the little girl by the window now thought and thought of Christmas, her fingers dropped the thread at last and, looking up from her task with her blue eyes full of dreams, "Grandmother," she said softly, "will the Christ-child surely come again tomorrow night? And do you think he will bring me something?"

"Why, yes, Karen, thou hast been a good child," answered Grandmother, who was trying hard to finish a difficult part of her lace pattern before the dark fell.

"And, Grandmother," went on Karen, after thinking a little longer, "is it really his own birthday?"

"Yes, yes, child," said Grandmother.

"Then," said Karen, as a bewildered look crept into her eyes, "why is it that he brings gifts to me, instead of my giving something to him? I thought on people's birthdays they had presents of their own. You know on my last one you gave me my blue kerchief, and the time before, my pewter mug." Karen considered a moment more, and then she added: "Is it because we are so poor, Grandmother, that I have never given the Christ-child a Christmas present?"

Here Grandmother's flying fingers paused an instant, though still holding a pair of the tiny bobbins, as she answered, "It is true we are poor, Karen, but that is not the reason. No one gives such gifts to the Christ-child. Thou must give him obedience and love; dost thou not remember what

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Father Benedicte told thee? And then, too, thou knowest thou art to carry a wax candle to the cathedral for a Christmas offering at the shrine of the Blessed Virgin and Child.”

“But,” continued Karen perplexedly, “does *no* one give him something for his very *own*?”

“There, there, child,” said Grandmother, with a note of weariness in her patient voice, “I cannot work and answer thy questions!”

And Grandmother bent still closer over the flower of lace which she was trying so hard to finish, and the little girl became silent.

After a while, from the beautiful tall belfry that soared into the sky from the center of the city, the chimes rang out the hour, and, no longer able to see in the gathering dusk, Grandmother rose and laid aside her work.

“Come, Karen,” she said, “put up thy work, and get thy shawl and go fetch some water for the tea-kettle.”

The little girl carefully placed her lace-pillow on a shelf at one side of the room; and taking a knitted shawl from a peg near the doorway, she ran to the dresser and lifted down a copper tea-kettle, polished till it shone. Then she unbarred the door and sped out into the snowy dusk.

She had but a short distance to go to the quaint pump that served the neighborhood. It stood among the cobblestones of the narrow street, and had been made long, long ago, when the workmen

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of even the commonest things loved their craft and strove to make everything beautiful that their fingers touched. So the pump had a wonderful spout of wrought iron shaped like a dragon's head; and as Karen tugged at the long, slender handle of the same metal, she laughed to see how the icicles hung from the dragon's mouth like a long white beard. She liked to pretend that he was alive and wanting to eat her up, and that she was very brave to make him fill her tea-kettle; for Karen loved fairy stories and lived a great deal in her own thoughts.

Meantime, the dragon had not eaten her, and the copper tea-kettle was brimming over with cold water, seeing which she stooped and lifting it in both hands, carefully carried it back to the little yellow house and set it on the hearth where Grandmother had raked out some glowing coals. Then she lighted a candle, and helped prepare their simple evening meal of coarse brown bread and coffee, though this last was for Grandmother; for Karen there was a pewter mug full of milk.

When they had finished their supper, Grandmother placed her lace-pillow on the table close to the candle and again busied herself with her work. For the wife of Burgomaster Koerner had ordered the lace, and it must be finished and sent home the next day.

And Grandmother sorely needed every penny she could earn; for, since Karen had neither father nor mother, there was no one but herself to gain a livelihood until the little girl grew older and could

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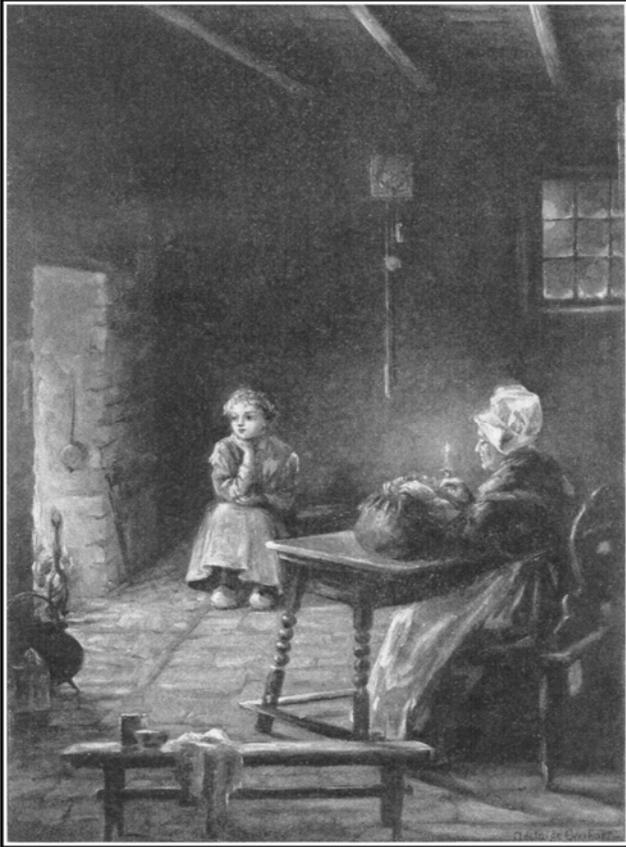
help carry the burden. To be sure, Grandmother was not really so old as she looked, but many years of toil over the lace-pillow had bent her back and taken the color from her face. While Karen's father had lived they had known more of comfort; but when he died and the mother had followed soon afterward, leaving her baby girl to Grandmother's care, there had been but little left with which to buy their bread. That had been eight years before, but Grandmother had struggled bravely on; she was one of the most skillful of the scores of lace-makers of the old city, and so she had managed still to keep the little yellow house in which she had always lived, and to shield Karen from knowing the bitterest needs of the poor.

But Grandmother was weary; and as now she bent over the fairylike web of lace in which she had woven flowers and leaves from threads of filmy fineness, she was glad that the piece was almost finished, and that she would have the blessed Christmas day in which to rest.

And while Grandmother's fingers flew back and forth among the maze of pins, Karen was busy tidying up the hearth and the few dishes which she neatly set back on the old-fashioned dresser near the fireplace. Then she drew a little stool close to the hearth, and, resting her chin on one hand, looked dreamily into the fire.

She was still thinking of Christmas eve, and the more she thought the more she wanted to give something to the Christ-child. For she was a gener-

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“RESTING HER CHIN ON ONE HAND,
LOOKED DREAMILY INTO THE FIRE.”

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ous hearted little girl and loved to share any little pleasures with her friends, especially those who had been so good to her. And she considered the Christ-child the most faithful friend she knew, "for," she said to herself, "as far back as I can remember, he has come every Christmas while I was asleep, and has always put something in my wooden shoes! And to think that no one gives him any present for himself!" For Karen could not see how giving him one's obedience or love (for, of course, every one expected their friends to love them anyway!), or offering a wax candle in the shrine at the cathedral, could take the place of some little gift that he might have for his very own.

Surely, she thought, the Christ-child must like these things just as other children do. If only she had some money to buy something for him, or if only she had something of her own nice enough to offer him! She went over in her mind her little possessions; there was her blue kerchief, her pewter mug, her rag doll, her little wooden stool; but none of these things seemed just right for the Christ-child. And, besides, she felt that he was so wonderful and holy that his present should be something not only beautiful, but also quite new and fresh.

Poor Karen gave a sigh to think she had not a penny to buy anything; and Grandmother, looking up from her work, said, "What is the matter, child?" And as Karen said nothing, "Where is thy knitting?" asked Grandmother, "'tis yet a little while till bedtime; see if thou canst remember how to make thy stitches even, the way I showed thee yesterday."

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“Yes, Grandmother,” answered Karen; and going into the little room that opened off from the living-room, she came back with a bit of knitting and again seating herself on the wooden stool, began carefully to work the shining needles through some coarse blue yarn. For little Flemish girls even as young as she were not thought too small to be taught not only the making of lace, but how to knit; and their hands were seldom allowed to be idle.

Indeed the folk of the humbler class in Bruges had to work long and industriously to keep bread on their tables and a shelter over their heads.

The city had once been the richest and most powerful in all Flanders, and up to her wharves great ships had brought wonderful cargoes from all over the world; and the rulers of Bruges and her merchant citizens had lived in the greatest splendor. The wealthy people were wealthier and the poorer people less poor in those old days. But then had come bitter wars and oppression; the harbor had slowly filled up with sand brought down by the river Zwiijn, till at the time when Karen lived, Bruges was no longer the proud and glorious city she had once been, but was all the while becoming poorer and poorer.

It was true there were many ancient families who still lived at ease in the beautiful old carved houses facing on shady squares or built along the edges of the winding canals that everywhere threaded the once busy city; though the quiet water of these now scarcely rippled save when the trailing branches of the overhanging willow trees dipped

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into them, or a fleet of stately white swans went sailing along. But in the poorer parts of the city the people must work hard, and there were whole streets where every one made lace; and all day long women and girls, old and young, bent over the black-covered pillows just as Karen's Grandmother was at that moment doing.

Grandmother's fingers steadily plied the tiny bobbins in and out long after Karen had put away her knitting and crept into the little cupboard bed which was built into the wall of the small room next to the living-room.

At last, as the candle burned low, the lace was finished; and carefully unpinning it from the pillow, Grandmother laid it in a clean napkin; and then she raked the ashes over the embers of the fire on the hearth, and soon her tired eyes closed in sleep as she lay in the high-posted bed close to Karen.

CHAPTER II

Buying the Porringer



HE next morning was bright and clear, and the sunshine sparkled over the freshly fallen snow and touched all the icicles with rainbow light.

Karen and her Grandmother were astir early. The little girl fetched down some wood from the small attic, over the living-room, where they kept their precious supply for the winter; and then she set the table as Grandmother prepared the porridge for their breakfast.

After breakfast Grandmother took her lace-pillow and began arranging her pins and bobbins for another piece of work; and when Karen had dusted the simple furniture and swept the snow from the doorstep, she put on her knitted hood and shawl, and pinning together the napkin in which Grandmother had placed the piece of lace, she set out for the home of Madame Koerner.

Down the narrow street she passed, and then across an old stone bridge that spanned one of the

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lazy canals that wandered through the city. The ice had spread a thin sheet over this, and the beautiful white swans that swam about on it in the summer-time had gone into the shelter of their little wooden house, which stood on the bank under a snowy willow tree. One of the great shining birds, looking herself like a drift of snow, stood at the door of the little shelter house preening her feathers in the sunlight, and Karen waved her hand to her with a smiling "Good-morning, Madame Swan!" for she loved the beautiful creatures, numbers of which are still seen on all the water-ways of Bruges, and she always spoke to them, and sometimes brought them crumbs from her bits of coarse bread at home.

Beyond the bridge she sped on past rows of tall brown houses with here and there a little shop crowded in between, and presently her way led across the Grande Place, a large, irregular square in the center of the city. Here there were many shops, and people passing to and fro; and among them went numbers of great shaggy dogs harnessed to little carts filled with vegetables or tall copper milk cans, and these they tugged across the cobblestones to the ancient Market Halles from which towered the wonderful belfry of which every one in Bruges was so proud.

Karen paused to listen while the silvery chimes rang out, as they had rung every quarter hour for more than three hundred years.

Then she passed on into a long, quiet street where the houses stood farther apart and had rows

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of trees in front of them. Some of them had high walls adjoining them, and behind these were pretty gardens, though now, of course, all were covered with the wintry snow.

Presently Karen stopped at a wooden gate leading into one of these gardens, and pushing it open made her way along a winding path to the door of a tall house with many gables and adorned with rare old carvings. This was the home of Madame Koerner; the house really faced on the street, but the little girl did not like to go to the more stately entrance, and so chose the smaller one that opened into the garden. She knocked timidly, for she was a little in awe of Madame Koerner, who seemed to her a very grand lady. But the maid who opened the door knew Karen and led her in and took her at once to the upstairs room where Madame Koerner sat with a fine piece of needlework in her lap.

Madame Koerner smiled kindly at the little girl, who had several times before brought Grandmother's lace to her. "Good-morning, Karen," she said, "I am so glad to have the lace, for now I can finish this cap, which I want for a Christmas gift." And then as she unfolded the napkin and looked at the lace, "O," she cried, "how lovely it is! No one in all Bruges does more beautiful work than thy Grandmother, little one! And some day, I dare say, thou, too, wilt do just as well, for I know thou art learning fast." And she smiled again, and patted Karen's hands as the little girl held out the lace for her to see.

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Karen colored with pleasure to hear Grandmother's work praised, as indeed it deserved; for the delicate scrolls and flowers and leaves of it looked as if made of frost and caught in a net of pearly cobwebs.

Madame Koerner was so pleased with it that when the little girl laid it down, she looked in her purse and gave her a generous gold piece for Grandmother, and then she added a smaller piece of silver for Karen herself; "That is for thee, little one," she said. "And I hope thou wilt have a very happy Christmas."

Karen thanked her shyly, and as with shining eyes she turned to go, Madame Koerner said, "Go out through the kitchen, child, and tell Marie, the cook, to fill thy napkin with some of the little cakes she is baking."

So when once more Karen tripped out into the street, her heart was very light and her mind full of happy thoughts as she tightly clasped in one hand the gold piece for Grandmother, and in the other the franc of silver which Madame Koerner had given for her own, and the napkin filled with the Christmas cakes. These were the kind that all Flemish children delight in, and were made of fine gingerbread and filled with candied orange peel and red cherries.

As Karen came near the Grande Place and saw the Market Halles, her eyes fairly danced, for she knew the Christmas market was going on there, and all the way from Madame Koerner's she had kept

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saying to herself: "Now I can buy a present for the Christ-child and one for Grandmother!"

Outside the Halles the cobblestones had been swept clean of snow, and a few hardy dealers had placed their wares for sale out of doors. But these were chiefly sellers of leather harnesses for the patient Flemish dogs, of wooden shoes and coarse baskets; and some had piled in front of them small bundles of fire-wood and fagots. But none of these wares interested Karen, and so she stepped inside the Halles where one might find all manner of things for sale. Here were stalls piled with different colored cloths, with kerchiefs and laces; in others were displayed great earthen pots and pans and other gear for the kitchen. And there were sellers of Christmas trinkets, and wax candles, and what not; of the milk in the tall copper cans the dogs had drawn thither in their little carts; of winter vegetables, and food and sweetmeats of various kinds.

"See!" called a white-capped woman, who sat behind a stall heaped with little cakes, "here are caraway cookies fit for the king's children, and only four sous the dozen!"

But Karen felt very rich with the Christmas cakes in her napkin, and so was not to be tempted. As she stepped slowly along, looking first at one side and then the other, presently she came to a stall where colored beads and trinkets of many kinds were arranged on a long strip of scarlet cloth. As she saw these, she could not help but stop and look

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longingly at a little necklace of blue beads, the very kind she had wanted for so long a time!

At this stall sat another white-capped woman dealer, who, seeing the wistful look in Karen's face, said: "Well, my child, if thou canst give me ten sous, thou canst take home with thee this pretty trinket. 'Tis a fair match for thine eyes, little maid!"

Karen's blue eyes began to brim with tears, for she knew ten sous were only half a franc, and she did want the beads so very, very much! But after one more longing look she resolutely passed on, still tightly holding her silver franc; for, much as she wanted the necklace, she was determined that the Christ-child and Grandmother should have their gifts, and she was afraid even her wonderful franc might not be enough for all.

So she went on, still looking carefully at each stall she passed, and all the while growing more and more perplexed trying to decide which were the very prettiest things she could buy. She had gone more than half the length of the market, and was becoming bewildered and a little frightened as she hugged her shawl about her and made her way as best she could among the different groups of buyers and sellers. And then, by and by, her face lighted up with pleasure as she stopped in front of a pottery dealer's stall. This was presided over by a kindly faced man in a workman's blouse. On a smooth board in front of him were all kinds of the coarser wares of Flanders, and also some pieces made by the peasant folk of Normandy and Brittany, countries

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not far away; and among these smaller pieces Karen had spied a little porringer. It was just an humble little earthen dish such as the peasants of Brittany make for their children to use for their bread and milk; but it was gayly painted, and Karen thought it the most beautiful porringer she had ever seen. Its flat handles were colored a bright yet soft blue, and around the inner edge of its bowl were bands of blue and red, and right in the bottom was painted a little peasant girl; she wore a blue dress and a white and orange colored apron, and on her head was a pointed white cap. She carried in one hand a red rose, and on either side of her was a stiff little rose-tree with red blossoms. It was all crudely done, yet had a quaint charm of its own, a charm lacked by many a more finely finished piece; and it stood there leaning against a tall brown jar behind it, the little girl in the porringer seemed to smile back at Karen as she paused, rapt in admiration.

For Karen was quite sure that at last she had found the very thing for the blessed Christ-child. Indeed, she felt it was the one thing of all the things she had seen, that she most wanted to buy for him. And then, too, just beyond the porringer, a little farther down on the board, she saw a small, green jug that she was sure Grandmother would like. She wondered if they cost very much, and hardly dared to ask the pottery dealer. But presently she summoned up her courage, and, pointing to the little porringer and the jug, she said in a timid voice, "Please, sir, tell me, can I buy these for my franc?" And she held out to him her little palm, where lay

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the silver franc all warm and moist from the tight clasp of her rosy fingers.

The dealer looked at her anxious face and smiled at her as he said: "Dost thou want them so very much, little one? Truly thou canst have them for thy franc. My price would be some fifteen sous more, but for the sake of thy sweet face and the blessed Christmas time thou shalt have them." And he put them into Karen's arms as she smiled her delight.

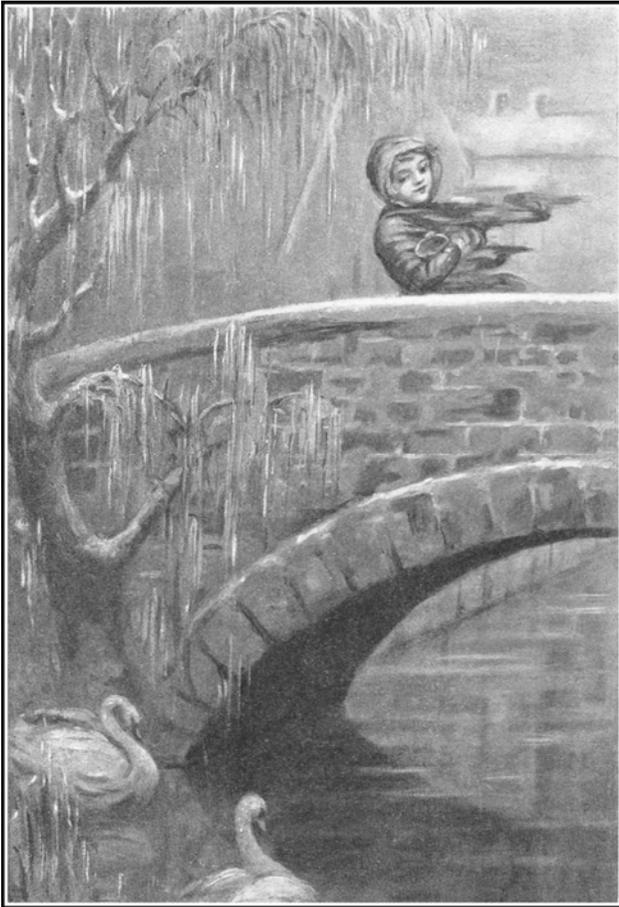
The little girl was so happy that she fairly skimmed over the snowy cobblestones. When she came to the old bridge spanning the icy canal, the white swan was still standing on the bank blinking in the sunlight, and Karen called out merrily, "Dear Madame Swan, I have bought the most wonderful things!" And then she laughed a little silvery laugh, for her heart was so light it was fairly bubbling over with happiness.

When she reached the little yellow house she bounded up the step, and, standing on the sill close to the door, she called "Grandmother! Grandmother! Please let me in! I cannot open the door!"

Grandmother, hearing her, hurried to unlatch it, and Karen burst in with "Oh, Grandmother, see these beautiful Christmas cakes that Marie gave me! And here is a gold piece for your lace!"

And then having freed one hand, she pulled her shawl tightly together over the other things, and smiling delightedly, cried "And Madame Koerner

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KAREN CALLED OUT MERRILY, "DEAR MADAME SWAN,
I HAVE BOUGHT THE MOST WONDERFUL THINGS!"

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gave me a silver franc for my very own, and I spent it in the Market Halles!”

“Thou hast already spent it?” asked Grandmother reprovingly. “Karen! Karen! wilt thou never learn to save thy pennies? What hast thou bought?”

“Oh,” answered Karen, as her face fell, “I wanted one of them to be a secret till to-morrow! They are Christmas presents! But I wanted to show the other”—here she broke off confusedly; she had meant to say she wanted to show the porringer to Grandmother, but now she had not the heart. “But, Grandmother,” she went on earnestly, “it was my own franc, and I love to buy gifts! And you know I couldn’t last year because I had no pennies.”

“Well, well, child,” said Grandmother softening, “thou hast a generous heart, only thou shouldst not have spent all thy franc; thou hadst done better to put some by for another time.”

Karen said nothing, though the tears of disappointment sprang to her eyes. She had wanted so much to show the porringer and share her joy in it with Grandmother. But now she felt that it would not be approved of since Grandmother thought her so foolish to spend all her franc, and especially since she had said that no one gave Christmas presents to the Christ-child. But though that had seemed to settle the matter for Grandmother, it only made Karen the more anxious to do so. She said to herself that if no one gave the Christ-child presents, it was all the more reason why she should—surely somebody ought to! And so she was not in the least

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sorry that she had not saved any of her franc. And she tried to think, too, that perhaps Grandmother would like a Christmas present herself, for all she said the money should not have been spent; perhaps when Grandmother saw the little green jug, she would think it so pretty that she would be glad that Karen had bought it. But she was not to see it till Christmas morning, for Karen meant to put it in her shoe just as the Christ-child did for children.

So presently her face brightening up, while Grandmother went on with her work, she ran into the other room and pulling open a deep drawer from a clothes-press that stood against the wall, she thrust the precious gifts under the folded clothes to stay hidden until she wanted them.

After dinner Grandmother began to prick the pattern for the new piece of lace she was beginning, and Karen knitted a while until it was time for the vesper service in the old cathedral of Saint Sauveur, whose tall tower rose above the steep housetops not far away.

When the bells began chiming, Grandmother and the little girl, laying aside their work, made themselves ready; and each carrying a white wax candle, which Grandmother had taken pains to provide some time before, they trudged off down the street.

When they reached the cathedral and entered through the great carved portal, the late afternoon light was falling in softly colored bars through the multitude of richly stained windows. As Karen gazed

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around at the many shrines where hundreds of wax tapers brought by other worshippers were already dotting the brightly colored air with their tiny golden flames, they looked so beautiful that for a moment she wondered if perhaps after all the Christ-child might not like the wax candles best. But the more she thought, she decided that he would surely be pleased to have something for really his own; for, of course, the candles were partly for God and the Blessed Virgin; and so she was glad she had the porringer that should be entirely his.

After the vesper service was over, and they were back again in the little house, the rest of the day passed very quickly for Karen. After supper Grandmother dozed a while in her chair beside the hearth; and then Karen ran into their sleeping-room and hurriedly took out the porringer and the green jug from their hiding-place in the clothes-press. Grandmother had put on some old slippers in place of the heavy wooden shoes she had worn all day, and these sabots were standing on the floor near her bed.

The room was dark, but Karen felt around till she found the sabots; and then she gave a little suppressed laugh of pleasure as she thrust the little green jug as far as it would go in one of them. She knew Grandmother would not find it till morning, for they never thought of having a light by which to go to bed; a candle for the living-room was all they could afford.

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After placing the green jug in Grandmother's shoe, Karen stood for a moment thinking where she would put the porringer. She wanted the Christ-child to find it without any trouble; for he must be in a great hurry with so many children's houses to visit and sabots to fill. She thought first that when she took off hers for the night and stood them on the hearth to wait for him, she would set the porringer beside them. But then she remembered that at midnight, when he would come, the room would be quite dark; for Grandmother would put out the candle, and cover up the fire with ashes. And while, of course, the Christ-child expected sabots to be ready for him on the hearth and so could fill them in the dark, just as she had put the jug in Grandmother's, still, he might miss the porringer as that he would not be expecting, and so would not look for it.

Then, all at once, Karen remembered that out of doors it was moonlight; for, when she had fastened the wooden shutters at the front windows, the moon was rising round and silvery above the peaked roofs across the way. As she thought of this her perplexity vanished, and again a smile came to her lips as she said to herself: "I will set it outside on the doorstep, and the Christ-child will be sure to see it when he comes, and, of course, he will know it was meant for him, for he knows all about Christmas presents!"

Karen was greatly pleased with this plan; and so giving one more look at the little girl in the porringer, she took up two of the Christmas cakes

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from the dish on the table, and, squeezing them into its bowl, she went to the door and softly unbarred it; then, setting the porringer on the doorstep where the moonlight touched it, she again shut and fastened the door.

Grandmother roused from her doze before long, and sent Karen to bed, while she herself stayed up to knit to the end of her skein.

But long after the little girl lay in her cupboard bed her blue eyes were wide open with excitement. On the hearth in the living-room stood her little wooden shoes waiting for the visit of the Christ-child, and she longed with all her might to see him! And she longed, too, to know if he would be pleased with the porringer. But Grandmother had always told her that he did not like to be watched, and would not come till children were asleep.

By and by, after what seemed to Karen a very long time, her eyes began to blink, and she fell asleep and slept so soundly that she did not know when Grandmother put out the candle and covered up the fire and came to bed. Nor did she waken later on when peals of bells from the tall belfry and the cathedral and all the many churches of Bruges rang in the Christmas, and the sweet echoes of chanting voices and the songs of innumerable choristers floated over the city as the holy midnight mass was celebrated.

The rain of music thrilled and quivered through the frosty air, and then slowly it died away; and the Christmas stars shone and twinkled, and the

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great silver moon flooded the quiet night with a white radiance.