

She had to be careful. She wouldn't want anyone to see her carrying the Baby to her house. She trotted quickly down the aisle and outside where it was now dark. The gaslights flickered along the streets and she could hide and wait in the deep shadows between. It was cold and people passing by were not in the mood to be looking at a little girl carrying something white in the dark. People wanted to be home sipping a nice hot cup of tea and warming their legs by the fire.

Then she stopped. How was she going to take the Baby Jesus into her house with everyone gawking and wanting to know who was that and what she was doing? She wouldn't go in the front door. There was a lane behind her house where she could carry the Baby over the wall and into her backyard. No, the wall was too high. She could climb over herself, but not with the Baby. She talked to him. "Will you help me, little baby? Will you help me?"

He did. He told her in her head to throw the Baby over the wall and recover him on the other side. That was hard. She threw and threw and he wouldn't go over till she threw the third time and over he went.

Then the terrible thing happened. When she climbed up and looked into her backyard there was no sign of him. Now what was she going to do? Where did he go? She was only six, but she knew how serious it was to lose the Baby Jesus. If she didn't find him, he'd be cold and calling for his mother.

Ah, there he was, all white in the dark, lying in the backyard of the blind woman next door, Mrs. Blake.

Now, perched on the wall, she talked to him sternly. Here she was trying to help him and there was no excuse for the way he was behaving, flying around like a bird and landing in a backyard where he wasn't supposed to be. She told him, "Baby Jesus, I have a good mind to leave you there in Mrs. Blake's backyard." But she couldn't. If God ever found out, he'd never let her have a sweet or a bun for a whole week. She told the Baby, "When I throw you over the wall you're not supposed to land in Mrs. Blake's backyard. You're not to be flying around like an angel."

She climbed down to Mrs. Blake's backyard and picked him up. This time, in one throw, he went over the wall into her own yard and that proved he was paying attention even if he had the same smile. She loved the way his hands and arms still reached out the way they did in the crib. She climbed into her own backyard, told him he was a good Baby for going where he was thrown, and hugged him to warm him up in that cold dark December night.

She nearly died of fright when the back door of her house creaked and out came her brother Pat going to the lavatory. He stopped and stared at her and the Baby, but she didn't mind because he was like a baby himself and often said foolish things even she wouldn't say.

"Is that the Baby Jesus you have there?"

"Tis."

"He's supposed to be sleeping in his crib abroad in the church an' you have him here in the freezing cold."

"I'm warming him up," she said.

"His mother will be roarin' an' bawlin' when she sees him gone. "

"She won't mind. She wants him to be warm, too."

"All right so."

He went into the lavatory and she stepped quietly along the little hall and up the stairs. She stopped at the top when she heard Pat's voice.

"Mammy, Angela do have the Baby Jesus up the stairs."

"Ah, now, Pat, love," said his mother. "You have a great imagination. Sit there an' have your tea. "

"She do, Mammy. She have the Baby Jesus above an' he's all white an' shiverin.' "

"All right, Pat. We'll talk to her."

"His mammy will be roarin' an' bawlin'. "

"Don't worry your poor head, Pat."

Little Angela knew she wouldn't be able to keep the Baby in the bed she shared with her sister, Aggie, all night. She'd let him rest there a while, all nice and warm in a blanket, and when it was time to go to sleep she'd put him under the bed and hope he was comfortable till morning.

Her mother was surprised to see her coming down the stairs at teatime instead of in the front door. "Was it having a bit of a rest you were?"

"Twas."

After tea she was allowed to sit by the fire listening to the talk of her family. She always wanted to say something, but she was told she was too young and to shush up. She was only six, so what could she ever say that was important?

Tonight she didn't mind one bit. She had a big secret: Baby Jesus above in the bed nice and warm. It was hard for her to keep that secret, but she could not say a word or they'd all want to see him and play with him like any old doll. She had a doll once which she still cried over when she remembered how her sister, Aggie, pulled its head off and laughed.