LITTLE HEISKELL

BY

ISABELLE HURLBUTT

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Author: Isabelle B. Hurlbutt; Illustrated by Alida Conover

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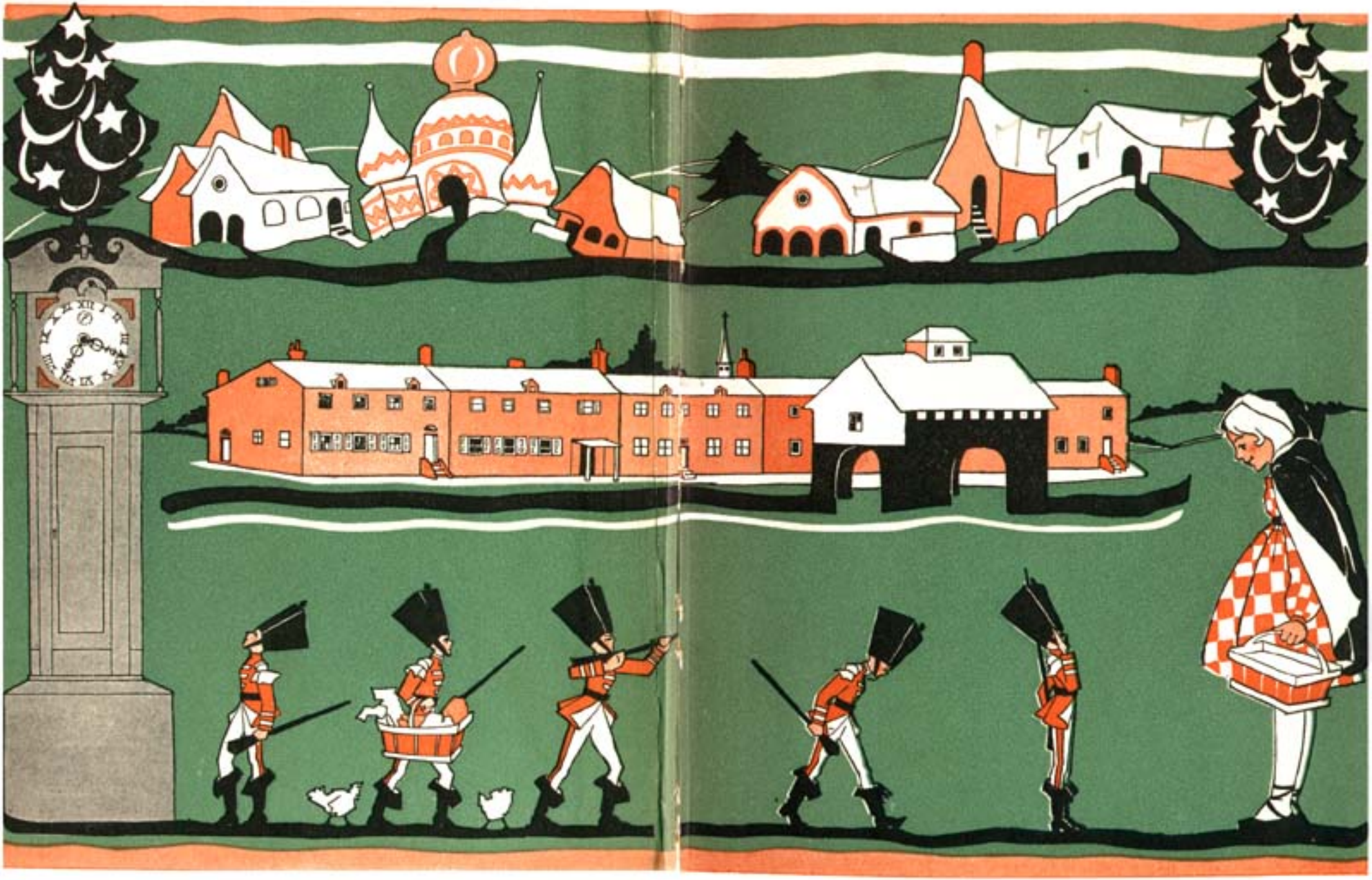

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In a polite but firm manner Little Heiskell asked for cream, little pads of butter, sugared buns, and zwieback

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To my friend

MARY L. TITCOMB

LITTLE HEISKELL

IT was three nights before Christmas. The snow flakes, falling steadily, covered the roof of the yellow market house with a white coat. The clock in the tower struck two in deep muffled tones. Little Heiskell, perched above it on his staff, bent over the old solemn face and laughed teasingly. He was feeling very gay and flippant, for hadn't he received a gorgeous new uniform bright with gold buttons, and a new shiny hat? He shouldered his musket firmly. The wind might come from any direction. Little Heiskell twirled around merrily with it, singing his favorite song:

"Who watches over Hagerstown
In wind and cold, in storm and heat?
Who stands at his post all year round?
'Tis I, Little Heiskell, Ra Ree!

"Who knows what happens through the nights
When streets are dark and very still?
Who sees the market brownies' lights?
'Tis I, Little Heiskell, Ra Roh!

"Who hears them riding about the halls
A'top of the mice and long-winged bats?
Who finds them jumping over stalls?
'Tis I, Little Heiskell, Ra Roo!

"Who sees them nipping on market days
While the good wives gossip and turn their backs?
Who sees the food carried off in their trays?
'Tis I, Little Heiskell, Ra Rum!"

At the end of rum he kicked up his legs jauntily. Undignified behaviour indeed for the town's most important weathervane, but of course it was the fault of the new uniform.

"Little Heiskell," grumbled the clock, "what has got into you? The older you grow the more childish you become; you never see me kicking about in that way."

"Wait till you get a little older," sang out Heiskell, "then you won't be so serious."

"Still, it's a little hard to have someone continually skating above one's head," complained the clock.

"Soon it will be Christmas," chanted Little Heiskell, paying no attention to his friend's grumbling, "and to-morrow the market will be gay with holly and mistletoe, and a great bustle of people running about buying good things for the holiday. I think I shall go to market too —what do you think of that?"

But his companion refused to answer. They

were loyal friends, these two, and would have felt very lonely, one without the other, having lived together for the last forty years; but the clock sometimes felt that he had to put up with too much nonsense.

Big Heiskell, the market master, ruled the square when Little Heiskell first came to town, a weathervane green to his duties. Up on the

tower of the old court house he had been placed. Hah! the wind soon showed him what to do. Those were glorious times, for everything worth noticing took place in the square. Underneath the court house, which was built on piles, stood the whipping post and stocks, and the lovely mud surrounding them was the pigs' playground. Big Heiskell might be at one end of the square,

taking a lively part in a horse deal. The pigs then made a dash for the mud, and, stupid things, squealed so loudly that the city fathers, above, had to shout to make themselves heard. For a minute or so the pigs wallowed in great contentment, then the court house door would open with a bang, and down would rush the dignified judge followed by the irate jury to chase them across the square. Big Heiskell came in for a share of their wrath, and woe to him who offended the market master after that. Little Heiskell, for one, took good care to attend to his duty, though filled with inward mirth.

There were the nights, though, when the square was almost dark, except for the friendly lights coming from the low houses surrounding it. Then it was quite safe to go on interesting expeditions. Sliding down his pole, Heiskell would first cross the square to flatten his nose against the window-pane of the village tavern, watching the company enjoying Mynheer Beltz-

hoover's strong cheeses and ale; and then, if he felt in a talkative mood, he would wander over and join the sentry who marched behind the tall palings of the fence surrounding the red brick bank. Up and down they would walk, the big sentry and the little soldier, each carrying his musket, and such tales as they would tell each other! Little Heiskell, being the more honorable in age, could always go Hans one better, for hadn't he saluted the great General Washington himself, when he marched through the village way back in 1776! Then there was his wound received during the Civil War. Little Heiskell had been strongly tempted to join the troops, but his conscience bade him stick to his post. There were some whose duty it was to guard the home fires. And what, please, would Hagerstown do without its chief weathervane? Thus Heiskell demanded of Hans, as they paced the court between the sentry boxes. Then the time came when the battle had raged around Hagerstown,

as all the old inhabitants could tell you. Did Little Heiskell think of leaving his dangerous position? No indeed, he had stayed right up on his tower though the firing came nearer and nearer. A bullet struck his leg, and he was wounded because he had stuck to his post. So he became a hero. Yes, there were risks to be run in this important position as the town's chief weathervane, but Little Heiskell never regretted it, even for a moment; life was full of stirring adventures. Hadn't he been the cause of a heated quarrel between two fac-

tions in the town? His fate hung in the balance for days, for when the old court house had been torn down, there were those who wanted to put a young upstart of a weathervane on top of the fine new market house built a block away from his old home. Public meetings were held and resolutions passed concerning him. His friends staunchly defended his right to this new honor. Little Heiskell couldn't help realizing his importance in spite of the anxiety as to his future. Finally his friends won, and triumphantly the soldier was carried to the tower of the new market house which had been his home ever since.

* * * * *

The snowflakes had stopped falling, and the air became very still. Soon the soft darkness was penetrated by a cold grey light. Little Heiskell heard the first creaking of wagon wheels coming into market. The street, still in semi-

darkness, was fast filling with all kinds of conveyances. The fragrance of pine and hemlock boughs mingled with that of newly baked rolls. Our friend looked down from his pole and saw the baskets of red cheeked apples between the green and silver trees. Each wagon and car was gaily decorated with laurel and garlands of ground pine; their owners called cheery greetings to one another as they hurried about arranging their wares. The snow, crystal clear, lay over the house tops, and the cross of a neighboring church spire shone a delicious gold against the blue of the long hills as the sun appeared behind them.

Little Heiskell chuckled to himself and twirled around with happiness. The fowl in the market set up a sharp clatter. "It's time to go to market," said Little Heiskell, and slid down his pole. He grinned impishly at the clock as he passed it, but his friend paid no attention to him, only remarking laconically:

"How can you go to market without a basket, Little Heiskell?" The soldier hadn't thought of this. He knew everybody carried a basket to market, but he hadn't any. Perhaps someone would give him one. Now he was on the pavement surrounded by the busy market crowd. Everywhere were good things to be had: Smearcäse, cranberries, nuts, zwieback, gingercookies thickly coated with white icing. Here an old man with a tall hat, his beard sweeping his waist, was ladling up sauerkraut for his cheerful customer. Little Heiskell eyed it wistfully. He wandered among the crowd eagerly looking for a stray basket. People jostled him on every side but no one paid the slightest attention to him; each had his basket which was quickly filled with all kinds of good things. Some women even carried two. All at once a timidity filled his soul, and he wished that he had never left his pole in broad day light; it was much better looking at people from above. But

now that he was down he must see a thing or two; it would never do to go back empty-handed and be laughed at by the clock. He wandered into the market house. Kindly, rosy-cheeked women were busily wrapping up cakes and rolls. The stove, with its hot glowing coals, was a popular place that morning, and many persons were crowded around it talking and laughing, making plans for the holidays. Out Heiskell went into the street again, passing near some crates of fowl. They were terribly excited, relating all kinds of barnyard news to each other. Near them stood a young girl, her face almost hidden by a soft grey hood under which peeped a sheer white cap. Her big basket was still empty. Ah, thought Heiskell, I will ask her to lend it to me for a few minutes. But as he was going

towards her, a large white hen raised her wings and cried in a derisive cackle:

"Look at Little Heiskell, look at Little Heiskell, he's come to market, he's come down from his tower! He hasn't any basket!"

Immediately all the chickens in the market took this up and sang in chorus: "He's come to market, and hasn't any basket!"

The noise was deafening, and poor Heiskell was filled with shame. Whither should he fly? Not to his tower. The clock's "I told you so," would be too hard to bear. Down the street he ran, past the red brick houses and didn't stop until he found himself near a grey shingled

house covered with soft green mould. On the steps stood a small flaxen-haired girl who looked quietly at him. He stopped, all out of breath, and felt rather ashamed of himself. He, a soldier, to be afraid of the stupid old hens of the market; he, who had been through so many real perils. But hens were noisome things and their gossip to be dreaded.

"Little girl," said Heiskell, drawing himself up with dignity, "permit an old soldier to rest himself a moment on your door step."

She nodded her head gravely and seemed to think it quite natural that a soldier in continental uniform should suddenly appear before her and talk to her.

"And what is your name?" asked Little Heiskell, conversationally, at the same time sitting down. He liked this quiet, dark eyed little maid who looked at him so seriously.

"Frieda," she told him. "There is no one in the house but me because my brother works all

day in the mill, and now that we are alone, I keep house for him. I am the cook," she added proudly, "but there isn't much to cook just now. You see, the rent takes up so much, and we owe many weeks back."

"Yes," said Little Heiskell, "I suppose rent would take a lot. It's too bad now, that you cannot live on a pole as I do. My pole doesn't ask any rent," he added with a chuckle. "Of course it has its disadvantages. The clock, with whom I live, is getting rather crotchety in his old age. He doesn't always understand my ways and he doesn't like my going about when I'm off duty with the wind. He's rather stationary, you know, clocks are, it's their way. But take a soldier like me, it's quite natural, don't you think, that I should want to lark a bit?"

All at once sweet chimes sang out from the house followed by the deep mellow strokes of a grandfather clock. Heiskell, who was musical, and loved all beautiful sounds, smiled in delight,

but was surprised to see the little girl's eyes fill with tears.

"And why do you weep when the good grandfather sings the hours so beautifully to you; and keeps you company?" he demanded eagerly.

"Because today Friederich will be taken away," said Frieda. "Mr. Reum

will take him for the back rent we owe."

"Oho," cried Little Heiskell, "so old Reum is your landlord! I know him well, and I must say he doesn't enjoy our acquaintance as much as I do. My friend the wind," he added mysteriously, bending over and whispering in the little girl's ear, "is very much at my call. In fact, we have quite confidential relations." Here Heiskell shook with silent laughter. And even Frieda had to laugh with him although she couldn't quite understand what made him so merry.

"Any man who owns such miserable rows of

houses as Reum does," continued Little Heiskell, "and makes the poor people within them more miserable, once in a while should have a little mischief done him. Especially if he rides a velocipede and has a red beard."

"H'm," added Little Heiskell more soberly, "might one see this old Friederich of yours?"

"Oh, would you like to?" said Frieda, quite forgetting her tears. "I'd love to show him to you."

Heiskell followed her into the house. In a room otherwise devoid of beauty, stood the clock. Its polished mahogany case was finely grained, the hood richly carved, and on the creamy surface of the dial shown two hands of solid gold.

Little Heiskell recognized a masterpiece and having a reverence in his soul for beautiful things, he presented arms to Friederich.

Frieda laughed softly, and took his hand.

"Do you know," she said, "at night when the

house is quite black and still, Friederich always tells me stories, and every hour he sings a tune, no matter how late it is."

"Yes," said Heiskell, nodding his head, "I quite understand. Friederich and I are old, and we know many strange things which we like to tell to those who care to listen. You, Frieda, are one of the gifted listeners. All your life you will hear beautiful tales. But now," said Little Heiskell, "let's have breakfast. Have you by any chance, Frieda, a market basket?"

Frieda had a lovely green one, very square and competent looking. Little Heiskell put it on his arm with dignity. "I will go and buy a few trifles for breakfast, and do you, Frieda, put on the coffee. After breakfast we'll consider Friederich's case. I think myself, Max Reum and Friederich would agree rather badly; it would never do to let them live together."

Armed with a basket, Little Heiskell was a different man. He straightened his shoulders

proudly and fairly strutted down the street. Now he could demand anything of anyone, for hadn't he, like the others, a large market basket just waiting to be filled? In a polite but firm manner he asked for cream, little pads of butter, sugared buns and zwieback. The chickens no longer bothered him, they had respect for him now that he was like everybody else. He eyed them scornfully; perhaps he would pop one of them in his basket, they watched him meekly.

"Stupid hens!" said Little Heiskell, marching past them, his head held high.

When the basket was generously full, with a

few sprays of holly thrown in, he went back to Frieda, stepping as jauntily as he could with his rather heavy burden.

Frieda, almost lost in a big blue apron and standing on a bench, for she was a small person, was busy cooking delightful porridge and splendid buckwheat cakes on the kitchen stove. Little Heiskell raced around and set the table with the best pink china, decorating it with holly. He was very clever about handing Frieda things—long wooden spoons and shiny pots such as all good cooks use. Now and then he would go over to Friederich and give him a friendly pat

and nod of the head, then he would break into song. Finally breakfast was ready. They sat down opposite each other, Frieda with very pink cheeks, her eyes dancing. It wasn't very often that she had the pleasure of entertaining a guest, and this was such an interesting one. She passed the coffee in her most grown-up manner.

"Will you have one lump or two?" she asked.

"Three please," said Little Heiskell, and they both laughed as if it were a great joke.

Old Friederich's soft chimes went unnoticed until he sang out eleven, when Little Heiskell jumped up.

"I must go now," said he, "but remember, no matter what happens, have faith in me. I shall be back before old Reum gets here, although," he added with a wink, " you may not see me."

"Are you perhaps a fairy?" asked the little girl, her dark eyes very big.

"Oh no," said the soldier chuckling, "only very old and wise. I'm Little Heiskell, you

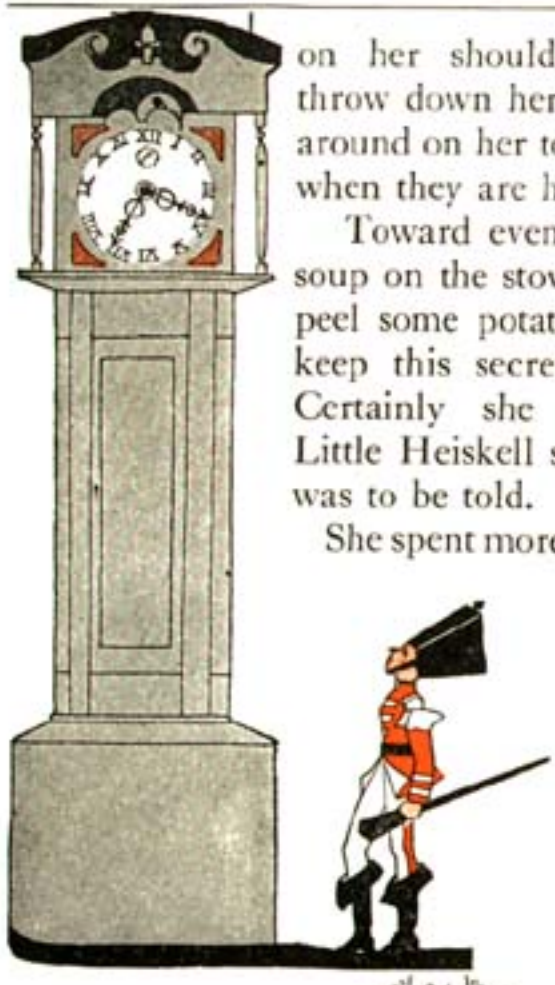
know," and with that, he skipped briskly out of the house.

"Old friend," said he to the clock in the tower as he climbed up his pole, "I could tell you such a tale—"

"Heiskell," answered the clock sternly, "get to your post. The wind has already waited five minutes for you. The people of this town will certainly demand a new weathervane if you can't keep faith any better than this."

Never had a day seemed so long to Frieda. To be sure there was much housekeeping to be done, but with this great secret she could hardly keep her mind on it. There were the rooms to be swept, the cat to be fed, Victor's shirts to be mended. She took her chair and placed it close to Friederich.

"You're not leaving after all," she told him. "Little Heiskell is going to save you." And every now and then, quite forgetting that she was the housekeeper with important responsibilities



on her shoulders, she would throw down her work and twirl around on her toes, as people do when they are happy.

Toward evening she put the soup on the stove and started to peel some potatoes. Could she keep this secret from Victor? Certainly she must, because Little Heiskell said that no one was to be told.

She spent more time than usual that evening watching for Victor. At last he came. His young eyes looked tired, their careworn expression made him ap-

It wasn't very often Frieda had the pleasure of entertaining such an interesting guest

pear older than his seventeen years. They were orphans, these two, with only distant relatives, and they clung to their home which Victor hoped to save. The hospital expenses of his Mother's last illness had been very heavy. But people were kindly in the little town, and knowing that the boy was putting up a brave fight to make a living, they waited patiently for their money—all but Max Reum.

The boy was relieved to see his sister so gay.

"Girls are queer," thought he, "I thought Frieda would be very sad on account of old Friederich leaving us to-night, but she seems to have forgotten all about it. Perhaps I can persuade her to go to bed early, before old Reum comes, then she won't have to see the clock go."

But no, Frieda wouldn't go to bed. She insisted on sitting up, and seemed very gay, talking all kinds of nonsense, her eyes dancing in the light of the fire which Victor had made in the stove. "Perhaps she has a fever," thought

Victor, looking anxiously at her. They drew up their chairs to get the warmth of the stove. It was a cold night, and the house not any too comfortable. One hour went by, and Victor's head nodded. He was very weary; soon he fell asleep. Frieda tiptoed to the window and peered out. The moon shown brightly on the quiet street, but not a sound could she hear. She went back to her rocker and curled up her feet on the seat. She must keep awake, for she didn't want to miss Little Heiskell. Would he remember? She stared very hard into the fire but the pleasant warmth from the stove made her sleepy and much against her will her eyes closed.

As the clock struck eight, neither brother nor sister saw a small figure in continental uniform silently open the front door, and wafting a kiss to the small girl asleep

in the chair, open the door of the grandfather clock and disappear inside. In the firelight the gold hands shone and the old mahogany made comfortable wood sounds which Frieda would have loved if she had been awake to hear them.

A sharp bell jangled unmusically through the house and both children awoke with a start.

"Old Reum," said Victor, trying to speak in a matter of fact way. He went to the door. Frieda sat quite still; was Friederich to go after all? What of Little Heiskell's promise?

The penetrating night air coming through the open door made Frieda shiver. "Remember,

no matter what happens, have faith in me," the soldier had said.

Old Reum came in; his small eyes, peering uneasily around the room, tried to discover his prize. He was followed by a big boy rubbing his red hands. There was no light in the room other than that from the stove. As old Reum moved toward the clock, the shadow of his thin bent figure danced impishly on the wall. He stopped in front of the clock, looking at it, and as he did so, the gold hands moved quietly once around the dial. He stepped back and eyed it with astonishment and then glanced suspiciously over his shoulder at Victor and Frieda.

"Here you, Pincus," he rasped out to his boy, "take the other end of this and let's out of here."

Pincus bent over to take hold of the bottom of the clock and together they lifted it. It was surprisingly heavy, thought Reum. As they raised it, a deep half audible sound like a groan came from within.

Pincus, his eyes nearly popping out of his head, let his end drop.

"This here clock," said Reum with a snarl, "is going to go with me no matter if all the seven devils are inside its workings. Haven't you got a light?" he demanded, speaking to the children for the first time. Victor went out and returned with a lamp.

With great difficulty, for Pincus' arms were weak with fear, they stumbled out of the house with their burden, and lifted it in the waiting cart. Victor and Frieda followed to the door. The clock lay with its dial illuminated by the moon, and to the children's amazement, the gold hands were racing around the dial as if they were alive.

Pincus, terrified, hid his face in his cap. Old Reum viciously cracked his whip and drove off with muttered imprecations.

Until they were out of sight, Victor and Frieda stood watching at the door. "Old Friede-

rich certainly acted very strangely," said Victor, much puzzled, "I don't think he likes his new owner. Don't take it too much to heart, Frieda," he added, not daring to look at the little girl. "Perhaps some day I can buy him back." When he finally glanced at his sister, he saw that she was smiling. "Girls are queer," thought Victor again. Certainly Frieda looked a bit like a pixie herself, standing with her pale hair flying and her brown eyes shining mysteriously.

The streets were very still in the sharp cold, as old Reum drove home. He whipped his thin

nag unmercifully and the poor beast slipped and slid on the icy road. Pincus sat with shoulders hunched, fearing some evil thing was going to happen to them.

They turned into a narrow street, badly lighted. At the further end stood old Reum's house, dreary and gaunt, with small, inhospitable windows. Old Reum jumped from his seat and lifted the clock with

trembling hands. He couldn't get it into the house fast enough. Pincus struggled after him, carrying the other end. With difficulty they got it through the door into a cold stuffy room containing a few pieces of uncomfortable furniture and sad looking bric-à-brac.

Old Reum tried to stand the clock on end, but the ceiling was so low that he was forced to put it slantingly against the wall. This exasperated him. "To-morrow the ceiling shall be lifted," he said, looking viciously at the clock.

After closing the door carefully and locking it, he climbed the ladder-like stairs. Pincus took the old horse around to the stable and went to bed in the only place allowed him, a small boarded-in section next the horse's stall. Old Reum lived in his house alone.

Soon the house was still; the snow commenced falling again, muffling all sounds. Max lay thinking of his prize. He had long coveted it, but knew that while Victor's mother was

alive he couldn't have it. Her grandfather had brought it from the old country as his most precious possession. Now it was safe in his house, no one should take it from him. He did well to get it at night when the neighbors wouldn't be prying into business which didn't concern them. He had told Victor, of course, that he could buy it back, but he knew that this was almost impossible. He laughed, burying himself in his blankets, as it was a cold night.

Suddenly a dull thud sounded through the house. Old Reum sat up in bed. "The clock," he said, staring suspiciously about him, "they are trying to steal my clock." He slipped stealthily down the stairs; on reaching the door he listened again. No step could be heard, only a muffled knocking coming from the closed room. He turned the key of the door and opened it without a sound. The knocking grew louder and came from the corner in which he had leaned the clock against the wall. His small eyes

tried to pierce the darkness as he made his way on tip toe hoping to surprise the thief. Suddenly he stumbled and almost fell over something hard on the floor. It was the clock which had fallen down; moreover the knocking came from within, growing louder and more persistent. Old Reum trembled so that his nightcap took on a perilous slant. He folded the grey lengths of his nightshirt about him as he cautiously bent over

the clock. He opened the door, and crack—quick as a flash it was pushed open and Reum's hand received a sharp rap as out climbed Little Heiskell pointing his musket at him.

"Max Reum," he said sternly, "I think I'm going to shoot you!"

The moon peering out of a bank of clouds lighted up the room, and the old man could see

the determined expression of the little soldier. He fell trembling to his knees.

"Little Heiskell," he whined, "don't shoot a poor old man who has never done you any harm. Surely a brave soldier like you wouldn't attack an unarmed man. I've always wished you well—"

"That's a lie," said Little Heiskell, promptly. "Who was it led the last agitation to have me down from my post so that I could be replaced by a new weathervane? Tell me that!" The soldier looked at him fiercely.

"But it's not that I've come for," he continued, putting down his musket and standing with his legs far apart. He looked with some satisfaction at the sad object before him. "There are better men than you, fortunately, running this town. Also I'm a very honorable tradition, and we don't discard those easily. But it's on account of Friederich, here, that you stole tonight from those poor children—"

"Stole!" cried Old Reum, quite forgetting his fear and rising to his feet. "This clock is mine by rights and what's more I'm going to keep it. They owe me six months' rent. Nobody shall take this clock from me, do you hear, you little devil?" and he bent down peering evilly into Little Heiskell's face.

For a moment the soldier returned his look. Then a slow smile spread over his face. Picking up his musket he gave three sharp raps on the window and then looked eagerly through it. Old Reum watched him with some misgiving. What was he up to?

There was a scraping sound against the window, and as Heiskell threw it open, into the room sailed a pole, an ordinary pole looking very much like a discarded flagstaff.

"My horse," said Little Heiskell, with great dignity, "will you please to get on, Max Reum."

Reum stared stupidly at the pole. Was he going mad? Suddenly he felt himself pushed

from behind towards this stick which was rocking gently as if anxious to be off.

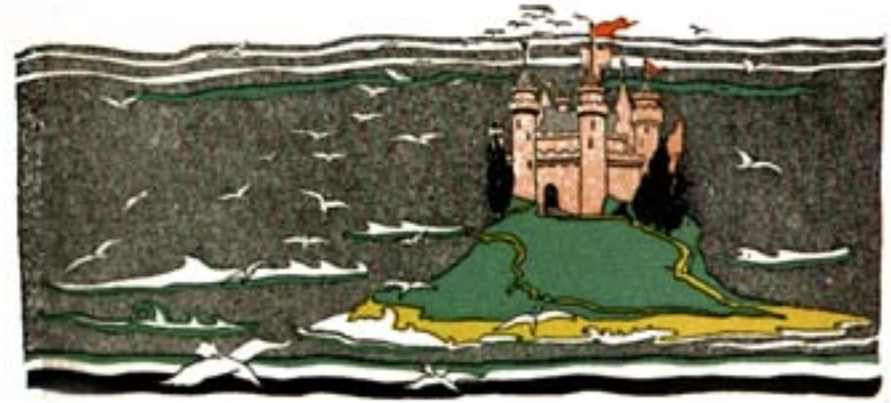
"Have you forgotten perhaps how to sit on a horse?" he was asked sarcastically.

As if hypnotized Reum straddled the pole mechanically. Quickly the soldier placed himself in front, and slowly the pole rose and sailed out of the window—up into the air.

Old Reum could do nothing but cling desperately to it; he would break his neck if he tried to jump. Further and further away grew the earth; soon they were near the silvery clouds and the

great moon, flying as swiftly as an aeroplane. Little Heiskell shouted with glee, riding the pole like an experienced horseman, and urging it to greater speed. Now and again he looked mischievously over his shoulder at old Reum, who was paralyzed with fear. Again he would call familiarly to the moon or a passing bird.

"Max Reum, Max Reum," sang Little Heiskell, "I'm taking you on such a journey as you will remember all your life!" They left the town far behind; way down below them the farms



nestled comfortably against the hill sides. The pole flew faster and faster; soon they were passing over mountain ridges covered with snow, and finally over large cities, lying silent and dark in the night. After a time Max heard whistles blowing, some deep, others loud and shrill. Looking down, he saw to his horror that they were flying over water, apparently a great harbor in which large boats were anchored or moving out to sea. Then all was dark again, and Max hardly dared look below him, for there, he knew, was the great ocean.

"And how are you enjoying your trip, Max Reum?" demanded Little Heiskell innocently. "Perhaps you would like to get nearer the waves," and he directed the pole to descend. Old Reum heard the deep roar of the billows, and the white foam looked as if it would be glad enough to reach up and drag him under. He gritted his teeth. Then all at once he saw a light; a ship brightly illuminated was moving tranquilly

along. Music was playing and people dancing on the deck; they seemed so safe and happy. Desperately old Reum tried to call, but not a sound came from his throat. Gradually the distance lengthened between them, and the music, heard but for a moment, was drowned in the sounds of the ocean.

When the first grey light of dawn appeared near the horizon, old Reum saw, to his joy, a long dark sheet of land stretching before them. It was an island, apparently, with a great castle standing on the side of a white slope. Around the island flew thousands upon thousands of gulls, calling, calling, dipping into the water only to lose themselves in the grey light. But Little Heiskell didn't stop here. On they flew, and now the sky gradually turned a warmer color. Soon the waves were tipped with soft rose that grew ever deeper and melted into dancing gold.

Heiskell was singing to himself—songs Max

had not heard for many a day. As the sun moved up on the horizon, they passed over land again. The country was flat, with here and there a farm house, its thatched roof covered with snow. Chimneys were sending pale columns of smoke into the air, and Max, with a groan, thought of the comfortable breakfasts being prepared within the houses.

All day they flew. Old Reum's legs were painfully stiff, he ached all over. "When is this devil's journey going to end?" he demanded

crossly of Heiskell. But the soldier seemed not to hear him. He was shouting and waving his cap to passing school houses and church spires. It seemed at times as if he must fall from the pole in his excitement, but fortunately he had an admirable seat. They passed over dark forests of pine, great winding rivers bordered by steep cliffs, and towards evening, the mountains rose once more on the horizon. Over their still heights they flew and on into a country of wooded slopes and little villages.

The light of a fiery sunset rested on a city with many towers, as they passed over it. Old Max bent down eagerly; he thought that he recognized something familiar in the hilly streets and steep roofs. It was a gracious city, planned with the loving care of those who longed to express their ideas of beauty in the houses in which they lived and the churches in which they worshipped. Many of the dwellings were decorated with beautiful carvings, others were painted with intricate designs. Rising from their midst were the grey walls of an ancient castle. Little Heiskell seemed quite beside himself with joy, and barely hanging on to the pole, he waved his cap to each weathervane clearly outlined in the yellow sunset.

An enchanting chorus of bells began playing as if in praise of their beloved city. Deep, clear tones were mingled with the harmony of flute-like chimes, each taking its part in the evening symphony.

Old Reum felt something grip his throat. Memories long forgotten came in wave upon wave over him. He forgot his stiff legs and hunger, and bent eagerly forward watching the country for landmarks he knew. Suddenly the hills appeared closer together. In a narrow valley the peaked roofs of a village came into view. The houses, huddled one against the other, followed the one long street curving in a half-moon. At the upper end stood a white church surmounted by a gold dome. It was dusk now, and the street was gradually filling with people walking toward the church. In the windows of the tall narrow houses stood lighted Christmas trees decorated with shining silver garlands and crystal icicles. The church doors were open, and the wax candles on the altar spread a warm yellow light reaching down the steps. Music was playing softly, and as the people moved toward the church they sang. Bright shawls and fur caps covered their heads,

fur edged their gaily embroidered coats and tall leather boots.

Old Reum felt his feet touch the ground, gently he was pushed from behind, and although an agony of cramps took possession of his legs, he eagerly hobbled after the crowd. Before him walked two children, a girl and a boy. Surely their faces were familiar. He tried to speak to them, but they didn't hear him. Walking hand in hand they

The street was filling with people walking toward the church

entered the church with the others, their young faces radiant with happiness. They pressed eagerly toward the front of the church, old Reum close behind them. Tears ran down his cheeks as he gazed at the familiar little scene of the Christ Child in the manger set up on moss and straw. The priest, in a silver and gold robe, intoned a prayer before the altar. The air was sweet with incense and the odor of pine and hemlock, as Max knelt with the others on the cold stones. Heavier grew the fragrance from the swinging censers, and Max, lost in thought, only heard the familiar chants as if in a dream.

Suddenly he became conscious, by the moving feet around him, that the service was over. The two children whom he had followed had disappeared, and he hurried out looking for them.

"Happy Christmas, neighbor," sounded from all sides as the dark figures melted into the deep arcades of the houses. Max stumbled along

looking searchingly from right to left. Then he saw the children he sought standing before a small house. Each carried a lighted taper, which they were shielding from the air.

"Look, Max," the girl was saying, "Mother is putting a star on the tree, and wait until you see the beautiful things she has prepared for your trip."

The boy looked up quietly, and then putting an arm around his sister's shoulders he led her into the house. Max pushed open the closing door and followed them up the stone steps.

"Mother," cried the girl eagerly, "here are the candles; they didn't go out, so Max will have fine luck on his trip to the new country."

A long passage led into the room with the lighted Christmas tree. Old Reum stood still on the threshold. Something held him there, although he longed to enter. For this was his old home, and there stood his mother embracing the young lad that was really himself. He stretched

out his arms and tried to speak, but he was voiceless.

Now she was leading the two children towards the shining tree and they gazed at its beauty.

"Mother, are these for me?" the boy asked delightedly. She was putting a splendid warm coat and fur cap on him.

"Yes, Max, for your journey to America, and these gloves too; and oh, my son," she added, only allowing her eyes to speak the grief she felt at the coming parting, "you will always remember to keep this beautiful festival wherever you may be."

Yes, so it had been just before his start on the great adventure. It was all so long ago, and his mother had died and later his sister had married and moved away, and so he had stayed on in America. He was old Reum now who for years had accumulated his money—for what?

"Always remember to keep this beautiful

festival." The words came to him again and again as the little room slipped further and further away. Now he was in a dark hall at the farther end of which the small room with its lighted Christmas tree seemed to grow smaller and smaller . . .

* * * * *

Suddenly he felt cold. A sharp rap made him sit straight up in bed. There at its foot stood Little Heiskell regarding him with a quizzical smile.

"You've had a long sleep, Max Reum," said the soldier. "Time to get up if you are going to deliver that clock before breakfast."

Without saying a word, Max got out of his bed and put on his clothes; he had many things to think about. As for Little Heiskell, never was any soldier so busy without really doing anything. One minute he was downstairs shouting to Pincus to hurry and harness the horse, the next he was up seeing how old Reum was get-

ting on. Then he bobbed into the cold little room to give the clock an assuring wink and nod.

A few minutes before seven they were ready to start. Max whipped up his horse; Pincus, who seemed to be permanently affected with lock jaw, sat beside his master. Now and again he looked furtively at him and then let his eyes wander to the back of the cart in which Friederich again reposed. On top of the clock perched Little Heiskell grasping his musket firmly and scanning the clouds anxiously.

"Make haste, Max Reum," he said, "at seven I must be at my post; there's a wind coming from the north-east." Opposite the old yellow market house they halted. Little Heiskell climbed down from the cart. Old Max looked up at the tower and his eyes rested on the pole; he stared at it for a long minute, lost in thought. In the meantime Little Heiskell had reached the top; waving his hat, he pointed significantly down the

street where stood a small grey house. Old Reum shook his head and, with a sigh, gathered up the reins.

* * * * *

It was several mornings later when Little Heiskell, munching his favorite zwieback, once more sat in the comfortable kitchen of the grey shingled house covered with soft green mould. Opposite him Frieda was pouring coffee from the pink china pot. In the center of the table stood a holly tree covered with red berries.

"I have so much to tell you, Little Heiskell," said Frieda, jumping up to rescue another buckwheat cake from the heat of the stove, "that I hardly know where to begin."

"Begin at the beginning, that's always best," offered Little Heiskell practically, and looked wistfully at the buckwheat cake which Frieda was balancing on the turner.

"Well," said Frieda, kneeling on her chair, and looking earnestly at Little Heiskell, "perhaps that is best. It was Christmas morning,

you know, and Friederich hadn't come. Of course I knew you'd keep your promise and I wasn't the very least bit worried, but I couldn't help wondering—"

"You couldn't help wondering?" said the soldier encouragingly.

"I couldn't help wondering," said Frieda, "when Friederich was coming. Then all of a sudden the front door opened, and in walked Mr. Reum and his boy carrying old Friederich. He didn't say a word, not even merry Christmas, but put him in the corner; and because it was seven o'clock Friederich said so. Mr. Reum just stared at Friederich and then at me and Victor who had come down, and his eyes, which used to look all frost-bitten, were kind and rather lonely. He said that he wanted to have a Christmas tree like those he had had in the old country, and would we mind having it here because he didn't think that his house would do.

"Victor was looking hard at Friederich, and so I didn't wait for him to say anything but told

Mr. Reum we'd love it. In a little while Mr. Reum and Pincus brought a tree and trimmed it oh so prettily with silver garlands and icicles, and on the very top of the tree he put a star, and right underneath it an envelope—way at the top, and he said that I should take it off, but I couldn't reach it, so Victor lifted me up and what do you think it said inside, Little Heiskell?"

Little Heiskell shook his head vigorously as if it were all too great a mystery for him to solve.

"It said that this house was to belong to Victor and me always! Now what do you think of that for a beautiful fairy Christmas?"

At this point the soldier was overcome with such a serious attack of chuckles that Frieda had to pound him on the back before he could recover.

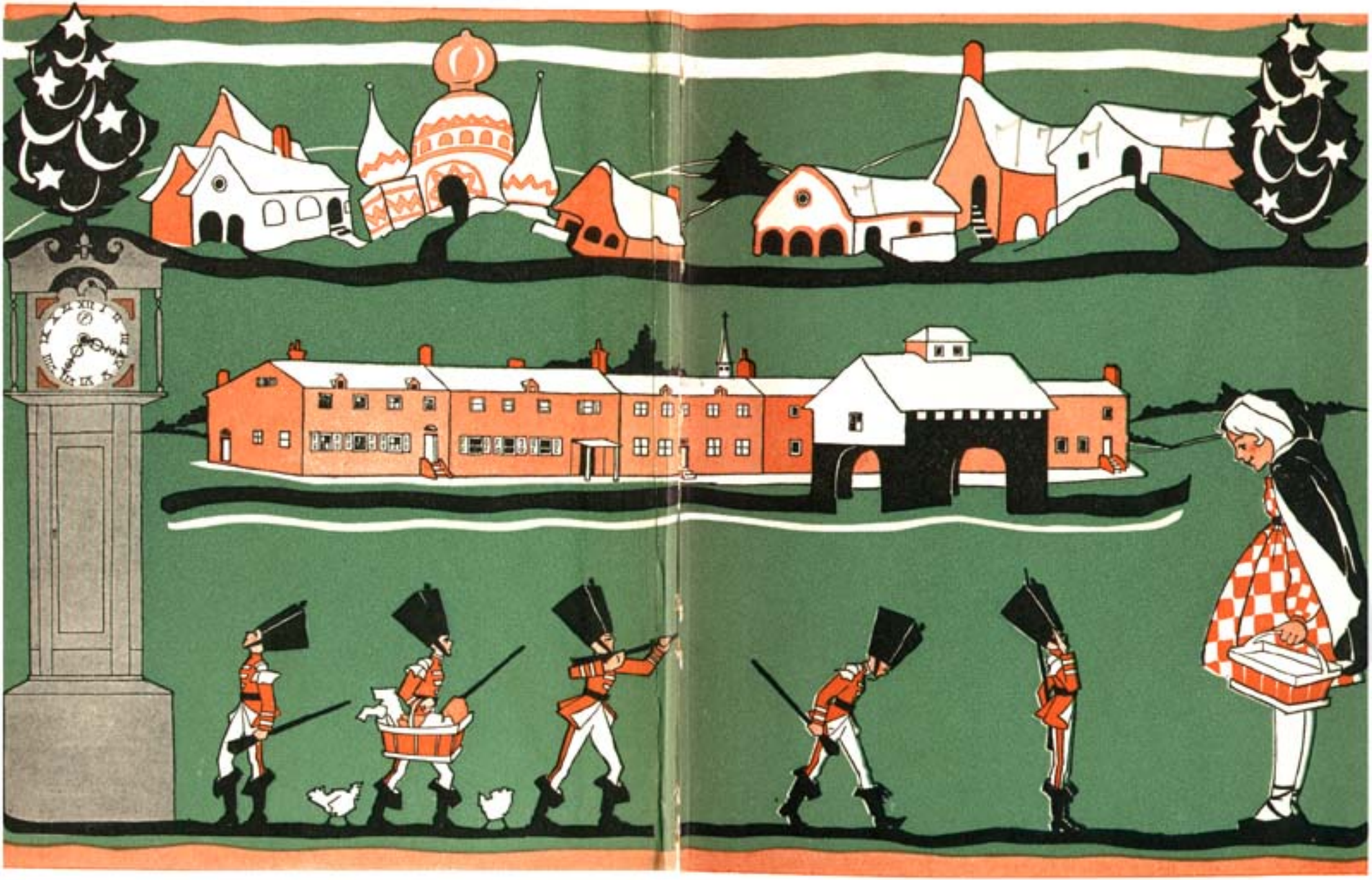
"And that's not all," said Frieda, quite breathless after her exertions to bring Little Heiskell back to normal, and balance the buckwheat cake at the same time. "Yesterday, Mr. Reum came

back and said that he needed an agent to help him improve and clean up his houses, and would Victor be that? And oh, Little Heiskell," cried Frieda, waving her turner like a wand and sending the now completely cold cake in a dejected heap to the further corner of the room, "won't you please stay and see Victor?"

But the soldier shook his head, smiling. "No, Frieda, I can't. Though Victor is a fine boy, he and I wouldn't understand each other. Max Reum and you seem so very different, but you're really quite alike—you're both dreamers, and so you see things which other people don't. You and I are friends, and Max Reum and I—well—I do believe we're friends too," said the soldier laughing. "But if by any unfortunate chance, Frieda, you shouldn't dream any more, I couldn't come down from my pole to see you. So don't ever be too grown up to dream, will you?"

Frieda promised she wouldn't.

"And now," pleaded Little Heiskell, "could I have just one more buckwheat cake?"



The End.