

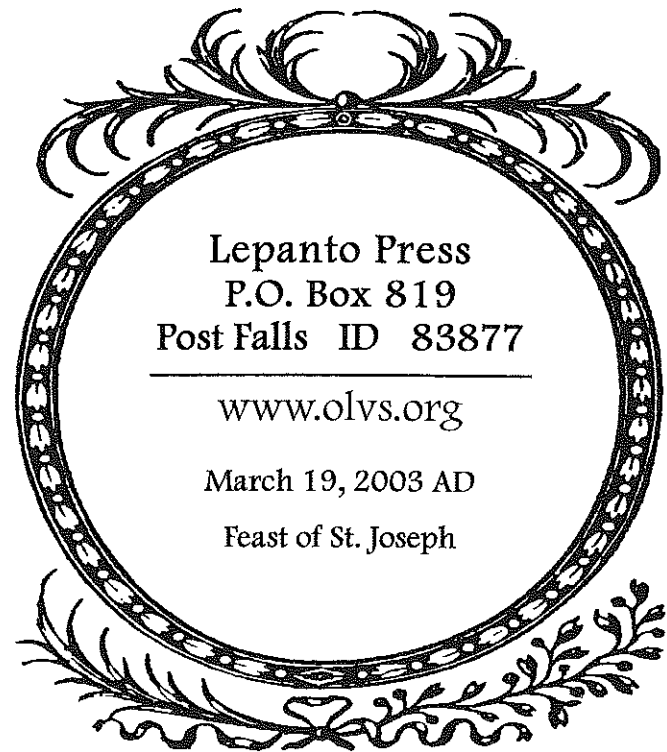


ALICE MORROW, THE FAIRY OF THE SNOWS

# THE FAIRY OF THE SNOWS

BY

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This book has been reprinted through the generosity of a kind benefactor. As a token of gratitude to him, please say one Hail Mary for his intention.

AM.D.G.

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# THE FAIRY OF THE SNOWS

## CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING, AMONG OTHERS, ALICE MORROW,  
THE FAIRY OF THE SNOWS

ON A Monday morning in January I was sitting at my desk in the school-office, steeling myself to deal with those little girls of the school who had not been present at the Sunday Mass. It was a gloomy day and a cold. Outside a goodly number of the Cincinnati street-cleaning department with shovels and wagons were busy carting away the heavy snowfall of the previous Saturday.

Presently there was a timid knock.

"Come in."

Enters a little girl of seven in sore distress.

"Well, Sarah, what is the matter?"

"Father, please, I didn't go to Mass."

"I know that. Why?"

"Please, Father, my shoes were at the shoemaker's, and he didn't have them ready till this morning. He was too busy all day Saturday to sole them."

I knew that Sarah was one of seven children; that the father earned thirteen dollars a week; and that the poor mother had more than she could do to make ends meet.

"Very good, Sarah," I said. "You seldom miss——"

"Father, please," she interrupted, "it's the first time since last summer."

In vacation months, be it known, Sarah had not gone to Mass at all. In common with her brothers and sisters she went barefoot during July and August—a saving to the family, in the matter of shoes, of about twelve dollars.

"Well, Sarah," I resumed, "your record is good. I'm sure mama couldn't help it. Do your best. Next!"

"Next" was a girl of nine—a gypsy-like mite, a thing of shreds and patches.

"What! Again!" I said.

"Father, we didn't get up."

"Who didn't get up?"

"None of us."

"But you seem to be up, young lady."

"I mean, Father, we didn't get up Sunday morning."

"Why didn't you?"

"Please, Father, we had a party at our house Saturday night."

"Who had a party?"

"My mama; and they didn't leave till ever so late, and we was all so tired we just didn't wake up in the morning—till after twelve o'clock."

"But what had you to do with the party? It was for grown folks, wasn't it?"

"Please, Father, I had to stay up to run errands."

"Oh!" Running errands had but one meaning in the matter under discussion. Little Jennie Jenkins had spent the night in bringing an empty pitcher to the corner saloon and returning with

it filled. The "party" meant much beer, a little "rag," and some villainous singing to the accompaniment of a still more villainous piano. I had seen and heard that piano. Such are the simple and sophisticated pleasures on Saturday nights of a certain class of our urban population. On Monday morning they are precisely where they were on the previous Saturday before the payment of the weekly wages. The Saturday "party" makes for Conservatism: those who persevere in it regularly never go forward; as to going backward, that is impossible.

"Jennie Jenkins, you're growing up a little Pagan! I don't believe you've been to Sunday Mass in three months."

"Please, Father, I was onctet."

"Now, Jennie, I want you to bring me a written note from your mother to-morrow morning stating why you missed Mass."

This was a terrible punishment—for the mother! Married women whose cult is beer have an intense repugnance to the use of pen and paper.

In answer to "Next," there came from the outer office into mine an apparition which caused me to straighten up and fairly gasp.

The little girl who now appeared came tripping in so lightly, trotting all the way to my side with such grace of motion, and looking up out of deep brown eyes so smilingly into mine that—coupled with the circumstance of her being attired in tiny slippers, white stockings, and a flimsy white dress—I felt as though a visitant from fairyland had somehow slipped into St. Xavier School.

Her features were regular, her face a delicate oval, and her expression candor itself. And then in the least possible fraction of a moment, in the face of a dark winter's day and the dull thud of snow-shovels without, there flashed through my mind Francis Thompson's exquisite quatrain:

"The hills look over on the south,  
And southward dreams the sea;  
And with the sea-breeze, hand in hand,  
Came innocence and she."

The little girl, slippered and all in white, brought sunshine with her, and the smile upon her face with the light of confidence in her eyes a hint of Spring. Flowers invisible were blooming all about me.

"Who are you, little girl?"

"Why, Father, don't you remember me? I'm Alice Morrow. You gave me a picture in October for being first in the fifth grade. I've got it yet. It's a picture of the Sacred Heart, and it's got all the promises on the back. I know them all by heart, and I'm teaching them to my next sister, Elsie. I've got it yet, and I keep it over our bed so we can see it when we wake up."

I regret to say that, in the complicated work of attending to the needs of eleven hundred boys and girls, I had completely lost sight of Alice Morrow, aged ten, and, as I knew from the records, the leader of the fifth grade.

"Oh, so it's you, Alice! I'm glad to meet you again; but you come around so seldom that you can hardly blame me for forgetting you."

"Oh, I don't blame you, Father. You've got such a lot to remember. I know I can't remem-

ber things sometimes myself. Sister Dorothy gave me this note to give you."

She had been holding an envelope in her hand. I took it, and while I tore open the envelope and read the letter Alice flitted and hopped about the room like a little bird in the branches of a tree. The letter read:

"DEAR FATHER: Kindly take a look at this little girl, Alice Morrow, the youngest, the brightest, and the sunshiniest child in our fifth grade. She attended Mass yesterday in the summer slippers and summer garments you now see her wearing. Winter—with the thermometer at two degrees above zero—appears to have no terrors for our tiny spring-maid.

"Respectfully,

"SISTER DOROTHY, S.N.D."

I took another look at Alice, who happened to be examining with evident pleasure the picture of a First Communicant—the most artistic thing, photograph though it was, in my office. The fine lines of Alice's face, the Madonna-like oval, the luxuriant brown hair, shot, in the sunlight (as I observed later), with gold were the first things that would strike one. But there was one detail in which her beauty left something to be desired. It is hard to rob tender years of the natural complexion; yet, looking closely, one could not but suspect that the child was poorly nourished. The roses of her cheeks would soon be the roses of yester-year. They were "fading fast away."

"Come here, Alice."

She was trotting toward me at the word, as

though she intended running me down; nor did she slacken her pace till she was quite upon me, when she came to a sudden halt in a manner quite beyond any creature of a large growth.

"Alice, did you have your breakfast?"

"Oh, yes, Father; we had potatoes."

"What else?"

"That's all, Father."

"Didn't you drink anything?"

"Yes, Father; we had water."

"Didn't you have any bread?"

"We had rolls on Saturday."

"Good gracious!" I exclaimed. "And what are you going to have for dinner?"

"Potatoes."

"And for supper?"

"Maybe we'll go to bed early, and then, you see, we don't need any supper. Mama doesn't know whether the potatoes will last out that long."

Potatoes as a regular diet, outside of Ireland, where this popular vegetable has a power of nourishment unknown in the United States, had never before occurred to me. It was only later I learned that, when everything else in the way of provender fails, and there is no credit at the grocery, the simplest manner of recruiting the larder is to send the little ones out on a scouting expedition for the despised potato. The quest costs nothing, and, though I have not yet learned how it is done, it brings results. Nevertheless, although I did not realize then that little Alice had spent the greater part of Saturday in a potato hunt, I felt sure that there was dire poverty in the Morrow household.

"Do you like potatoes, Alice?"

"Oh, yes! Why, I don't get enough—at least, I think so; but mama says more people die from eating too much than from eating too little. And then, Father, when I get tired of eating potatoes I put more salt on them, and shut my eyes, and imagine I'm eating salt-herrings. Do you like salt-herrings?"

Not feeling quite equal to answering this question to the young lady's satisfaction, I went on:

"Are those your winter shoes?"

"Father, how can you ask that? Uncle Ed gave me these last summer. But they're real warm in the house, you know. And when I come to school I pick out the places where the snow is hard or there ain't any, and I hop and skip from one place to another. It is as good as a play."

"You hop and skip like a little bird, eh?"

"That's just it, Father; how did you guess it? Sometimes I make believe I'm a little bird, and sometimes I'm a frog; they hop, too, you know."

"Where do you live?"

"At 371 East Third. Here's the way you get there. When you come to the right number, you go in by a side passage and walk up the staircase to the second floor. But don't you go in there. There's a woman lives there who uses language that's just awful; and she's got a boy who steals bicycles, and two girls who pull my hair and jerk the ribbons out, and stick their tongues away out at me. Mama says they're common. No, you go back through the house when you get to the second floor, and you come

to another staircase leading up from a porch on the other side, and you go up that, and then you get to our place on the third floor away back. If you come down to-day, you will find my mama and my papa in. Papa's a plasterer, you know; but he hasn't had any work for three weeks."

"How many children are there in the family?"

"There's me, and Elsie, who's eight, and Frank, who's six, and Margaret, who's three. Elsie's in the third grade, and she's learning fast. This is the best school I ever went to."

"Have you been to so many?"

"Five. Last year I went to the public school in Dayton, the year before to the Catholic school in Columbus, and the year before that to the public in Cleveland. I forget where I went to school first; but I think it was somewhere in Virginia. Our family has traveled a lot."

"Sit down, Alice, and take off those slippers."

"Michael," I called to my office-boy without, "come in here and see if you can't get this little girl a pair of shoes."

Michael, long accustomed to such orders, entered, opened the clothes-press, and while he attended to Alice, who kindly gave him unasked a number of autobiographical details, I called up by telephone one of my friends and co-workers in charity, Miss Margaret Dalton.

"That you, Margaret? This is Father Carney of St. Xavier School. Yes—Carney. Have you time to make a visit in a case of extreme necessity? There's a little fairy in my office by

the name of Alice Morrow of 371 E. Third St., third floor, away back. She hops and skips like a fairy out of a pantomime, and is dressed as though she were about to appear in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I don't know whether fairies live on a diet of potatoes or not, but that's what this particular fairy is doing. From what she told me, there are not enough potatoes in the house to go around for supper. The father has been out of work for several weeks. It looks like a deserving case. The girl is as clean and as neat as a pin, and talks with a certain amount of refinement. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Father: and I thank you for calling me up. How many are there in the family? Three little girls, one boy, and the parents? Very good! I'll go at once, and let you know later."

And thus entered into my life, with results I purpose faithfully setting down, the Fairy of the Snows.