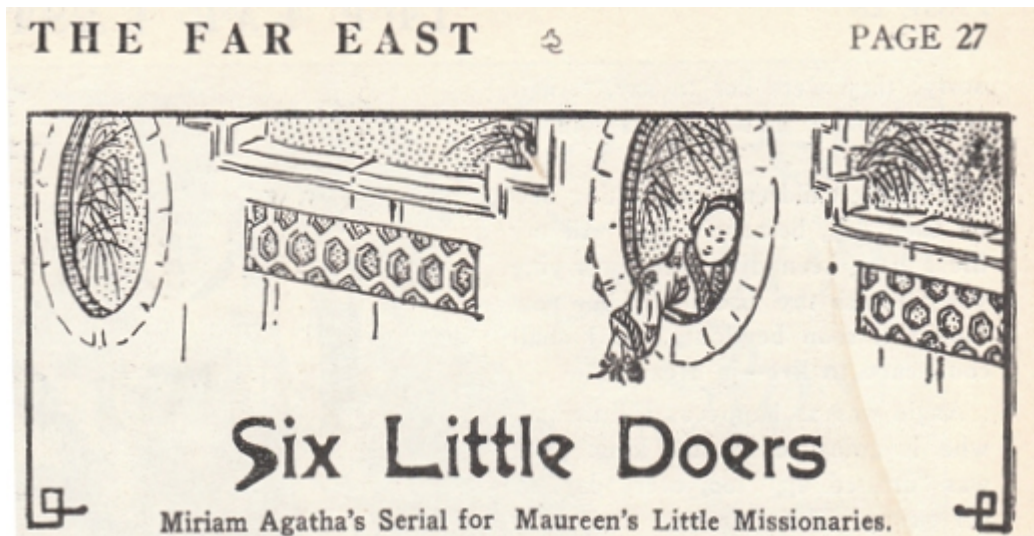


Chapter 11 – The end, December 1923



IT was Christmas time the again. Down in church the Crib was being prepared. The little manger lined with straw was ready, awaiting the tiny white and gold figure of the Christ Child; the star hung down trembling, but dull. Not until Christmas morning would the sudden glow of light wake it to life. Behind the stable stretched out the picture of a sandy plain, dotted here and there with palm trees, and in the distance a group of large buildings, half hidden in a purple mist, marked the city. Children came in, to stand and look at the stable, but the Little Jesus was not there, so they turned away with a patient sigh to await His coming. To little children, Christmas is so long

in coming - the days before it are such long, long days.

Up at Dalys' the house was decked in its usual Christmas greenery; Christmas bells and Christmas bush, in great bunches, brightened every room with their glad message of the love of the Infant Saviour. But the house was strangely quiet; there was no rushing to and fro of little boys' feet, no scampering of excited paws along the verandah. Even Shamie went about with drooping head and dull eyes. He knew. Baby Bet's dolls and Teddy Bear were sadly neglected; the child-haunted mother, creeping like a little, white - faced baby - ghost from room to room. Mary helped everybody, and made a capital nurse. The boys did not want to play; mother sent them on little messages she had invented to take them away from the house for awhile, but they hurried back; they could not forget.

In Angie's room a little blue lamp burnt night and day before the statue of Our Lady, and a little red one before the Sacred Heart. But the Dalys did not pray for Angie to get well. Oh, no; she wanted to go to Heaven, and they would not hold her back if they could. To Heaven! No more pains for the little, delicate body, no more fears for the tender blue eyes, no more striving to be brave and strong.

"I don't feel leaving you all, mother. Do you mind? Does it seem cruel to be like that? You see, you'll all come to Heaven soon. It won't seem long to me. But I am sorry for you left behind. It will seem long for you all, I know. But for me! I am going to Heaven. I keep saying that over and over when the pain is bad and the medicine nasty: 'I am going to Heaven.' "

She told her brothers and sisters, they were not to cry, and not to be sorry; they were not to say, "Angie is going to die," but "Angie is going to Heaven."

"Tell the children I am getting better each day, because I am. All my life I have been dying, and worrying you all with my 'bad days,' but now they will soon be done, and I shall commence to live - in Heaven."

Angie was as happy as a little girl who is going to see the king. She was "dressed up," too, every day, in her pretty white dresses and blue baby bows. But mother had a little brown shroud ready in the wardrobe.

Have you ever prayed for a joyous death? Angie must have, for that was the only word to express her dispositions. You know how joyful, how excited you are when you are going somewhere with your father. How delighted you feel getting ready how impatient for the moment of departure. That is how it was with Angie - she was impatient to take her Father's hand and be off.

The Christmas hamper was packed in Angie's room where she could see it; every article was held up for her inspection.

Dr. Chester came twice a day, but he could do nothing for her; he came rather to stimulate his own fortitude, and learn a lesson from his little patient. He carried messages - always cheerful - from Angie to his own poor invalid.

Father Breen came every morning after Mass, bringing Angie Holy Communion. The Sisters, too, were constant visitors, and Angie was indeed a privileged little girl.

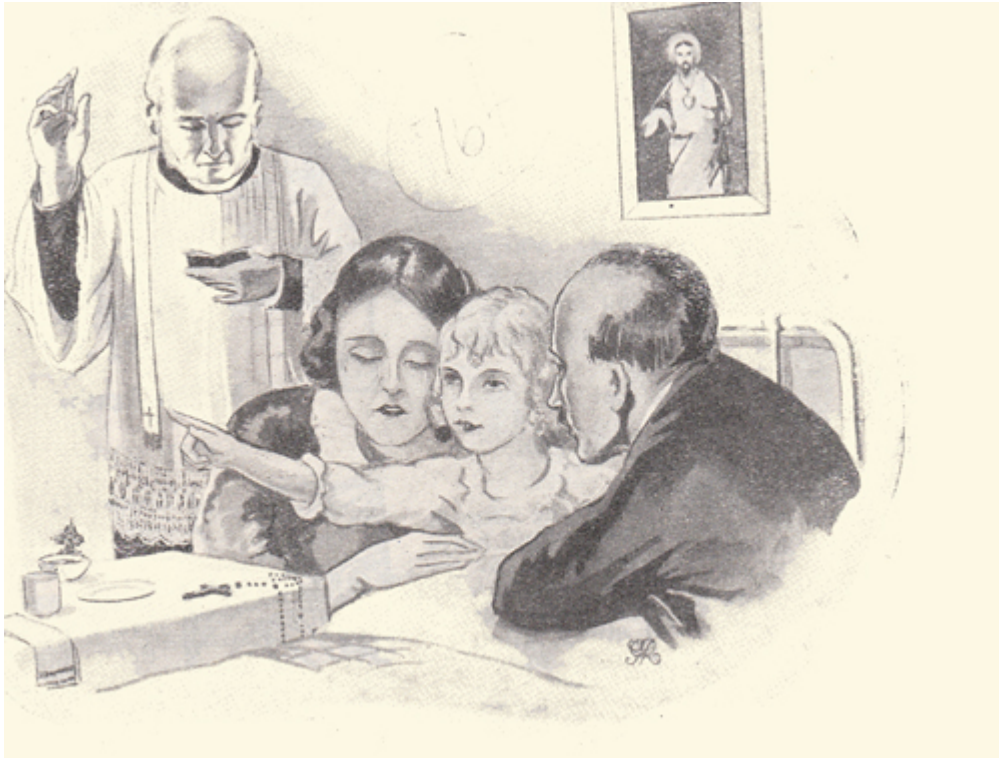
Dr. Chester said she might linger as she was for many days, and Mother was hoping that she would have Angie one more Christmas; but the Holy Child wanted her in Heaven on His Birthday; she was "invited" for that day.

Early on Christmas Eve, just when mother was preparing the little white table for Father Breen and the Guest he brought with him, she noticed a strange change on the child's face. She had raised herself on her pillow.

"Angie!"

"Mother, look out the window. Is Father Breen coming?"

Mother ran to the window. "Yes, dear, he is just turning the corner near Mrs. O'Neill's."



"I can wait that long," Angie said, and sighed, and sank back again. Mother bent over her.

"I must wait for our Lord to go with me. Poor Mother! I know it's very hard for you. Is the table ready?"

Mother straightened the white cloth, put the vases of Christmas roses on either side of the candle, arranged the holy water, and the shining glass.

"I feel a little afraid, Mother. I suppose it is the devil. I know he tries to frighten people - at the last. But I won't be afraid when Our Lord comes. Poor, poor Mother. I am so sorry for you." She smiled gently into the tender face bending over her.

"Pray hard for me. The devil is trying to make me frightened. Bring Kate in to pray. Will Father and the children soon be home from Mass?"

Father Breen hastened his steps when he saw Mother anxiously watching at the door; Father and the children saw her, too, and saw Father Breen hurrying. Snatching up Baby Bet, Father ran up the street, the children following him.

They all knelt round the little, white bed; the children, seeing Father and Mother's eyes were dry, held back their tears; Teddy bravely said the "Confiteor."

Father Breen raised the Sacred Host. "Domine non stum dignus," he said "Lord, I am not worthy," whispered little Angie, as she clasped her little thin hands together.

Father and Mother and the children - even Baby Bet, who knew Our Lord was there - raised their eyes a moment, to tell Jesus that they knew it was His will, that they were ready to give their Angie back to God. They all knelt silently a few moments, while Angie whispered her

prayers of thanksgiving. Then again a change passed over the child's face. Father Breen commenced the Prayers for the Dying; Mother slipped one thin little arm into the brown habit. Father held the child in his arms, Mother leant over the other side. The children came quietly, one by one, to say good-bye to the sweet little sister who had been the angel of the household.

Baby Bet's eyes were big and wondering.

Angie found strength to smile.

"Say good-bye to Polly and the Teddy for me," she whispered.

When it was Mick's turn, Angie drew his face down, until she could slip an arm about his neck. Mother helped her.

"Mind the temper, Mick. Think of Angie when you want to get in a temper. I'll be watching you, and then I'll ask the Holy Child to make you patient. All the pennies in my money box and my mite box are to go into your mite box, and I've told Dr. Chester and Miss Chester they are to have you for their little Missionary now, instead of me. Be good, Mick. I think you'll go to China some day - to help."

Mick sobbed, and the other children at once burst into tears. Father and Mother, too, could no longer keep back their tears.

Father Breen prayed on, and for a few moments Angie lay quiet and still. Suddenly she raised herself as if quite strong and well.

"Oh, Mother, Dad - look!" she cried, in a voice of wonder. She held out her little thin arms, and with a sigh of love, of content, sank back into -Dad's arms.

The End.