

At intervals a drop of liquid fell from the vats, and the sound of its fall echoed long in the quiet workshop.

The noise from outside broke dully against the window and took Sandu's thoughts back to other days. And all at once he began to carol to himself:

"And as you journey thither  
There comes wafted many a mile,  
From where the Holy Infant lies,  
The scent of fair flowers,  
The glow of bright torches,  
The smoke of the incense,  
The song of the angels."

He sang softly, and the dead past of the years he had spent since he left the home where he was born seemed to unroll itself before him. And as he saw himself alone, and deprived of every kind of pleasure, a tear crept into his eye, and with his head resting upon his hand, he sat gazing into the fire. All the nine years that he had spent Christmas among strangers, he had envied the joy of others, and never once had he felt in his heart the peace of the season as he used to in the days when he was at home. And who would think of him, or who would give him any happiness at this holy festival?

The workshop door opened hastily, and the appearance of Ana scattered his thoughts to the wind.

"Sandu, I have brought you something for Christmas." Sandu did not hold out his hand for it. "How you look at me, Sandu! Why do you not want what I bring you?"

So saying, Ana came quite close to him, and put what she had brought into his hand.

"Ana," said Sandu, in a stifled voice, "may God look upon you as I look at you."

His voice seemed to come from the depths of his soul, and Ana's look grew troubled. The kindness and sorrow with which he spoke touched her strangely, and resting her head upon his breast she murmured as in a dream:

"Sandu, dear Sandu."

But she had to go, for she had stolen from the house when some boys, carrying Magi, had arrived, and her mother would be looking for her.

Sandu remained behind to tell himself that never had God given him a happier Christmas.

The day after Christmas, in the afternoon, his various god-children came to Master Dinu's house: hospitality demands hospitality. They brought with them rolls and other things. Mistress Veta spread food upon the table, and whoever came took in exchange a roll from the god-parents.

By the evening, Lena, Tziru's widow, alone remained.

Master Dinu was in a hurry to get away, and Ana was downstairs with some friends.

The women remained by themselves, enjoying the wine and conversing. And when two women sit gossiping, who escapes unscathed by their tongues? One person is so and so, another person dresses so absurdly that every one laughs at her, and so the idle talk runs on.

"Doesn't it make you laugh"--Mistress Veta takes up the word--"when