

**LITTLE
NAN'S VICTORY**

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Little Nan's Victory by Annie E. Courtenay

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ANNIE E. COURTENAY

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ALL HOT! ALL HOT!

[See p. 19.]

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BY

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CHAPTER I.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH OF DECEMBER.



THIS ES, it was Christmas Eve, and a very bright and pretty scene did the busy, crowded streets and lighted shops, gay with Christmas decorations, present. Groups of well-dressed people thronged the wide pavement, and clustered

around the plate-glass windows of the grander and more aristocratic shops. It was piercingly cold, too. A bitter wind had sprung up, and blew stinging little flaky pieces of snow in the faces of the passers-by, and soon sugared the ground all over with their snowy whiteness. Of course the weather did not matter much to those people who were cosy in furs and velvet, and had a good many pleasant purchases to make; and so, although it was tea-time for most of them, the streets were pretty full, and a great many took advantage of the brilliantly-lighted refreshment-rooms, from whose glass-doors stole forth a glowing heat, mingling with the fragrant smell of tea and coffee, luring many a passer-by.

Outside one of these windows a ragged little girl had stood for some time, gazing wistfully at the tempting viands *so far beyond* her reach. Though small

and thin, she was conspicuous among the crowd for her very forlorn and wretched appearance. Her thin, ragged little frock hung loosely about her slight frame, and every now and then, being caught by the fierce wind, fluttered like a bit of flimsy paper. Across her shoulders she held a portion of what had once been a bright red shawl, which she every now and then pulled in vain to try and stretch it big enough to cover the small chapped arms. Her little feet were kept from coming quite bare upon the pavement by a pair of very old shoes, which sorely chafed her tender chilblains; the ragged, unkempt hair fell loosely about her shoulders, framing a face thin and meagre, with sharp, pinched features, and eyes large, hungry, and wistful, at times even mirthful, in spite of her forlorn condition. Every now and then she put her poor cold fingers into her warm mouth, and pulled them out again quickly

as a hollow, racking cough shook her slight frame from head to foot. She turned away at last, as she caught sight of one of those austere-looking protectors of public safety, policemen, who were by no means friendly to such as she, fearing he might think she had stood too long gazing at those ladies who were busily drinking hot chocolate and eating something very nice. The streets were a perfect fairy palace of delight, with their pleasant associations of Christmas, to this ragged child, who, inured to cold and hunger by the experience her short life had given her, almost forgot them now in looking on at all there was to be seen, and in wandering about with but that one purpose.

'How nice Christmas is!' she said softly, speaking to herself, a habit she had got into through having no one to whom she might tell some of her strange thoughts and feelings, save the poor

woman who sometimes did a kindly thing for the lonely child when she came in her way, for she had known Nan's mother. 'How kind of God our Father in heaven,' she continued, 'to let a poor little girl like me see all the pretty shops and nice people, and not be driv' off by the p'leece once this day—I s'pose 'cause it's Christmas! I wonder how it is up in 'Appy Land,' she said, raising her face to look up at the sky. 'I guess they're 'avin' a nice time, 'cause it's Christmas down here. I s'pose dear dad and mother and little Tom are enjoyin' theirselves ever so. I hope I shall go up to 'Appy Land very quick—at least when I've seen the rich folks 'ave their Christmas a little time longer down here.'

She stopped to cough, that hard, hollow cough, and to look behind her to see if the policeman was coming. 'I'm glad I know what Christmas means,' she