

LES CONTES DE L'ETOILE FILANTE

BY THE COMPAGNONS DE NOTRE DAME DE L'ETOILE ★ TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARYLIS

TRANSLATION: Isabelle AUBERT-BAUDRON & Paul O'DONOVAN

STELA MATUTINA



INTERZONE EDITIONS



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INTRODUCTION

"Stella Matutina" is a Christmas tale for children, published in 1936 in France by the Imprimerie Franciscaine Missionnaire, and it has not been edited again since. The copy I have belonged to my grandmother, and I read it as a child. After being read by several generations, it was not in good state, so I first scanned it to print it for my nephews.

After several unfruitful attempts in Quebec and France to find the actual owners of the rights, I came to the conclusion they had disappeared.

Though the content of the story refers to a religious context, this publishing does not stand in such a step, as this tale is a Christmas tale, like any other one. I put it on line on internet because of the quality of the graphics, and also in the framework of my job as a psychotherapist, to put it at children's disposal, because this story contains elements allowing to liberate from problematics of guilt, and existential ones, based upon a tragic, absurd and desperate vision of human life.

I translated this book and Paul O'DONOVAN corrected the translation. It also exists in French, in the original text, published by Interzone Editions.

Isabelle AUBERT-BAUDRON



Once upon a time, there was a small star who was playing in the deep sky of a summer night, with her sisters, the other small stars. She was running so fast she was called: the shooting star. Passing in front of a window, she saw little Mimi in her bed who could not sleep. Mimi had not asked for a light to see while sleeping though she did not cry. So the small star came and settled on the edge of the balcony (this is very extraordinary for a star)... She cast light on little Mimi and told her engagingly:

"Good little girl, do you want me to tell you a story which I brought from my journeys?"

- "Oh yes !" said little Mimi.

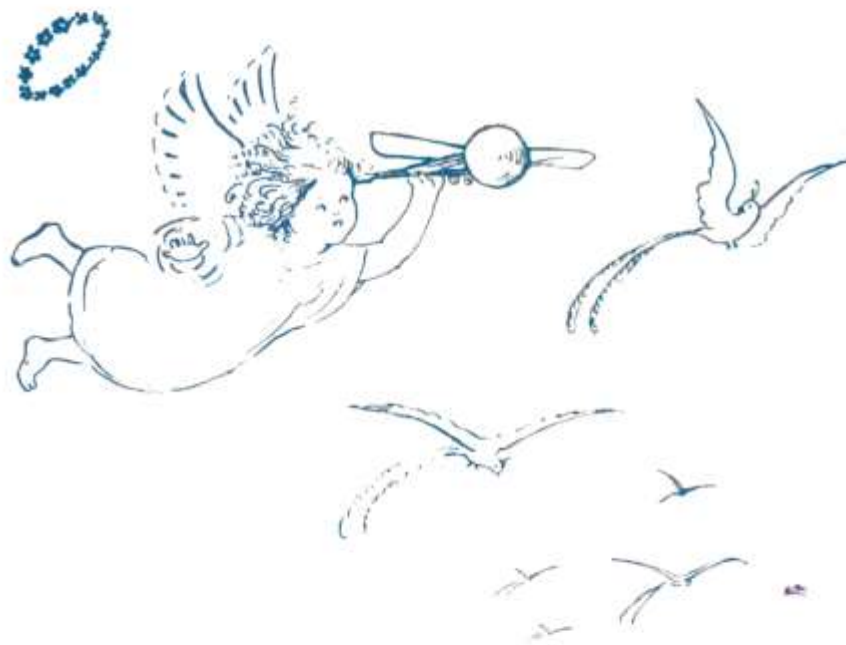
- "What kind of a story ? I know so many, good little girl."

- "I think," said little Mimi kindly, "that a star story would be perfect for a start."

- "I know one," the star said, "which is about Little Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, a little angel, a little boy ...and a star..."

- "That is what I should like," said little Mimi, making herself comfortable on the pillow.

Then the star began :







Once upon a time, in the garden of heaven, there was a little angel – a tiny one – who was playing with other little angels. They were playing at all kinds of pleasant games as one would play in heaven.

But often the angel would leave his games and run to lean over the balustrade of heaven, to watch the earth. It was so far away that the small angel could not see much, though he stayed, pensive, forgetting everything else. Behind him the hoops were bowling, the balloons were bouncing, the birds were singing, and the oranges

were fragrant in orange trees that were always in blossom. The cherub did not hear anything, did not feel anything, and did not see anything, nothing except the small round ball; so far away, so far away, the place that was the earth. He remained watching it throughout many long hours, so long that the big angels, intrigued, had told Our Lady about it.



Therefore, one day, as if by chance, Our Lady approached his side. The little angel was so absorbed that he did not hear the light noise of her coat on the pink gravel of the alleys, - usually, when the angels listen to this gentle sound, they are delighted, because they love Our Lady so much, as she is so beautiful and so good that nobody can tell just how much – but certainly, our little angel did not hear anything.

"What are you doing here ? " asked Our Lady sweetly.



The little angel turned round quickly, quite ashamed, as if he had been caught in the act, but he did not say anything and bent down his head.

"What are you doing here, my little angel ?" repeated Our Lady so sweetly, that the little angel plucked up courage and whispered :

"I want to go down to the earth..."





- “Why would you want to go down to the earth ? Don’t you feel well here ?”

-“Oh! Yes, Queen Mummy.” (In heaven, the little angels are allowed to call the Blessed Virgin: Queen Mummy). “Oh! Yes, I feel well, but I would like to go down to the earth with little JESUS when he goes for Christmas. A grown up angel told me that on the earth, there are children who look like us, I would like to see them and give them toys.”

The cherub stopped, he did not dare to look up... If he had looked up, he would have seen that Our Lady was smiling.





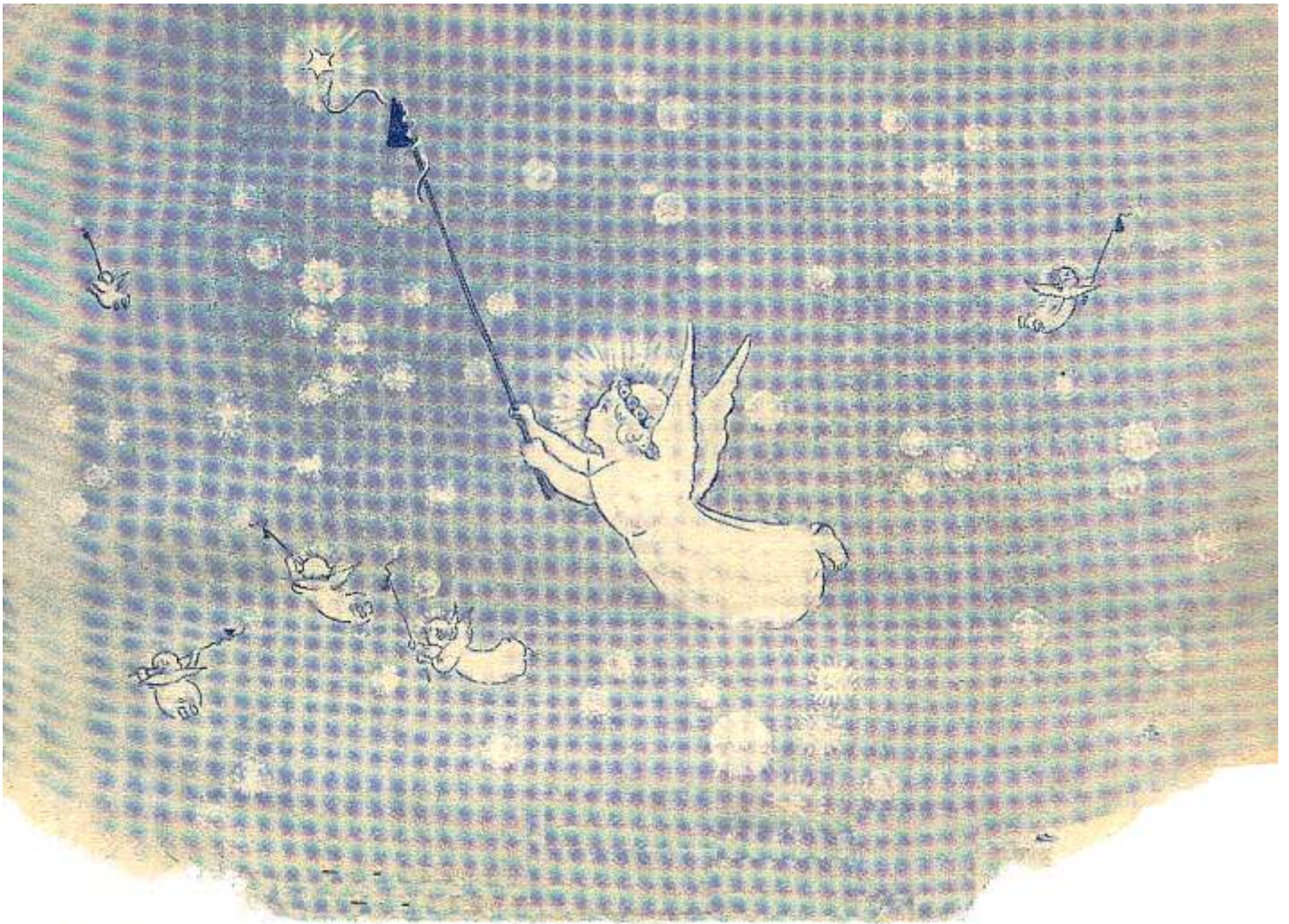
In heaven, must not all the wishes be granted ? This is why, when Our Lady went away, the little angel's heart was full of hope.

This is also why he spent all the following days flying from one tree to another, over the flowered lawns of heaven. Didn't he need strong wings to undertake the long journey from heaven to the earth ? This is also why, on Christmas Eve, early in the morning, he was nominated alone, - so little an angel among the big angels who were to go with The Christ Child in his round, to give toys to good children...



This whole day was spent in big preparations. Our Lady filled herself her little angel's basket with the most wonderful things one can dream about, beautiful to see, good to eat.





As soon as the blue of the sky became darker, so that the stars lighted one by one, and the evening came, upon the pavilion of heaven, brightly illuminated, the royal cortege met. Christ Child said good bye to his Mum who had come with him, and promised her to be back as soon as the first lights of Christmas dawn would appear. Then, holding the little angel's hand, he came down to the earth.

Christ Child flies without wings and his flight is more rapid, even sweeter than the one of the angels. Behind him, loaded with presents, came all those who had been chosen to come with him. They were passing through the blue night, across the stars, so beautiful, so luminous, that behind them there floated for an instant, a trail like a wake of golden dust...

The earth was getting bigger now. The little angel, so happy to hold The Christ Child's hand, was starting to perceive things. First the sea, which looked like a vast dark spot with a great noise of waves, then the leafless trees which were shivering in the wind, then the forests of black firs on the white snow, then a small mountain,





where at the bottom, stood a small belfry. It was a poor village, similar to the ones one can sometimes see in heaven in the books which tell about the saints' lives...

But the small angel had never seen this in real life; in heaven, buildings are much more beautiful. So The Christ Child told him:

"Enough flying for now, my little angel, for you who are not used to going so far. Go down towards this village, there are good little children who look like you and love me. You will give them a kiss from me, in their bed, very sweetly, without waking them up, then you will leave them a nice toy and oranges and some sweets... but when the first star begins to grow pale, you must fly away back towards heaven..."

The little angel promised to do this and The Christ Child quickly went away repeating again :

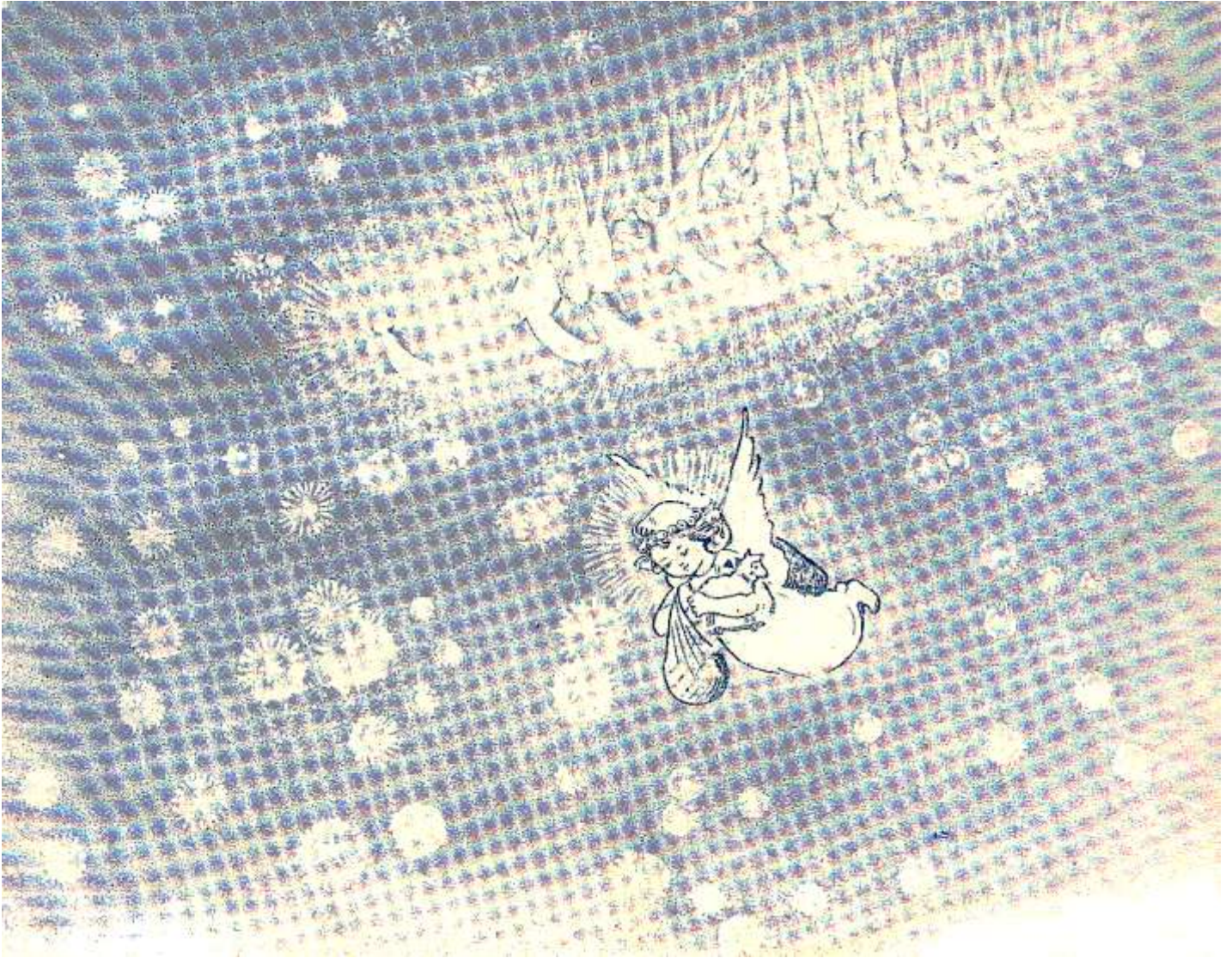
"Above all,
do not come
back late."



The cherub, who was floating further down and down, could feel the large cortege of the big angels passing over him. Their wings were playing like a choir organ in the wind, until he suddenly found himself alone. His heart was beating strongly, not from fear (nobody can hurt God's angels), nor from fear of getting lost, for he knew that by going straight upwards, he would arrive back in heaven, but he was very moved in his heart because he was going to see for the first time the little angels from the earth who looked like him.

And as the little angel went around the village, he entered in everywhere – as angels know the secret of going through chimneys, or windows, or doors,



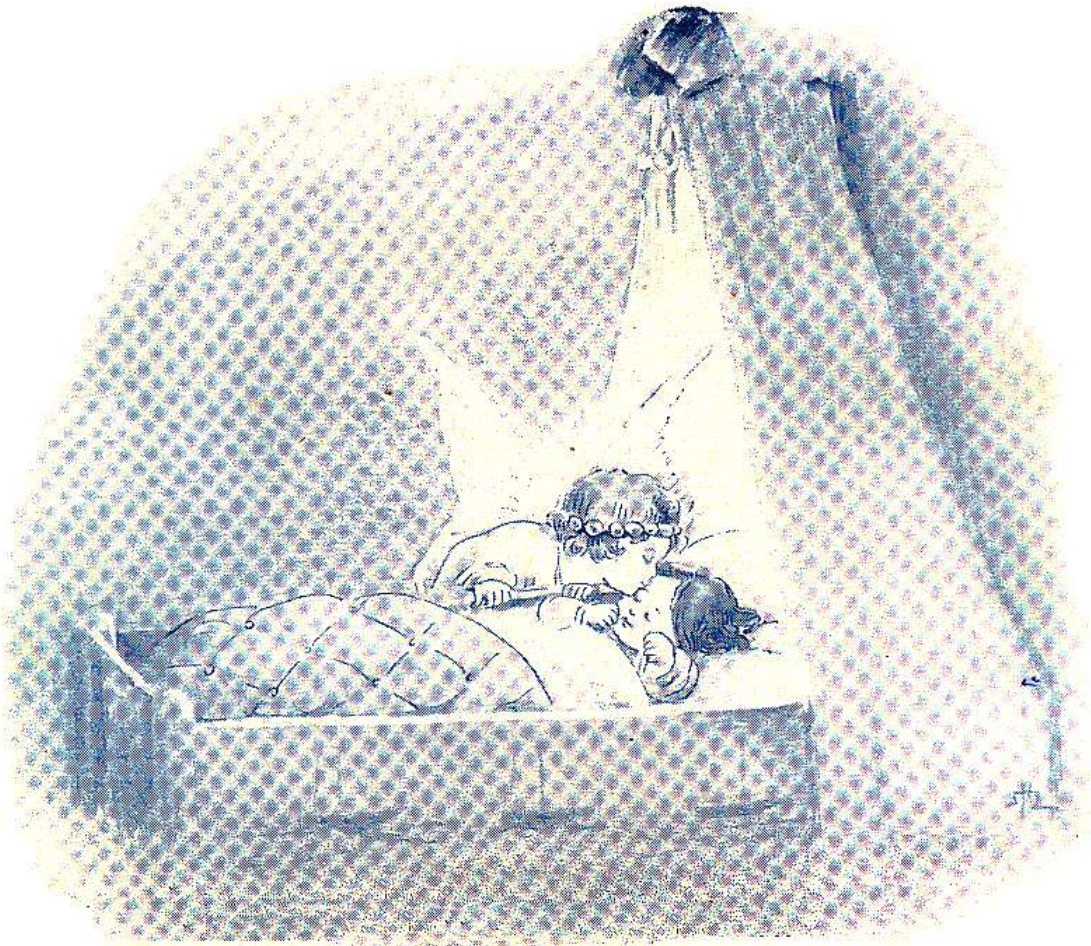


even when they are locked...

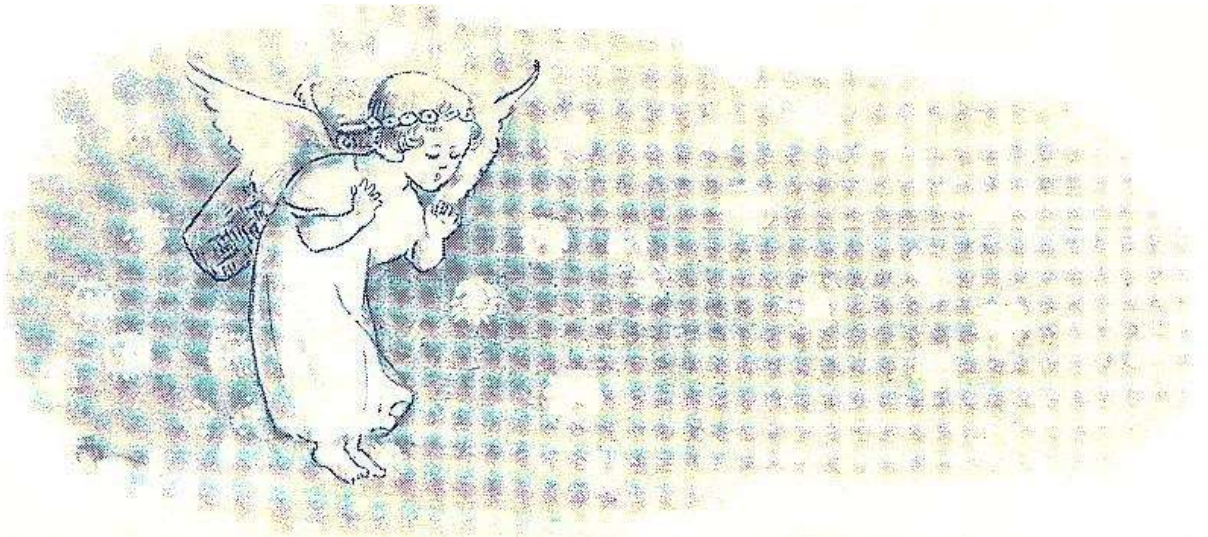
He saw charming little children who were sleeping in their beds and found them beautiful.

He was seeing from their foreheads if they were good, or a little bit naughty. On the foreheads of the good ones, he gave a kiss from The Christ

Child; on the foreheads of the other ones he was dropping a tear. Happily, he did not find any completely bad children; otherwise he would have been sobbing his heart out.



When the first star started to grow pale, the round was finished and his basket was empty. The little angel, rather tired but also happy, opened his wings towards paradise.



Then, as he was going up, there on the edge of the road, on some steps far from the village, across the dead branches of the trees, he saw a shadow, a small, tiny house, a house without light, so dark and so hidden he had missed it. The little angel's heart started to beat strongly.

"I hope there is no child in this house" he thought anxiously.



In three beats of his wings, he came back down and peeped through the round bedroom window. It was dark in the shanty, but the angels can see without any light.

There the cherub saw a little boy who was sleeping on a pile of dry leaves, poorly covered with an old piece of blanket. This little boy looked so beautiful to him that he came in to watch him closer.





This certainly was a good child, a very good child; he was saying his prayers correctly, had learnt his lessons, and helped his poor mother as much as he could.

He was so cold while sleeping, because there was not enough to cover him, there was no wood to make a fire in the fire place either.

For some days, his mother could not heat any water in the pan to make a soup with bits of bread she had been given. She had gone to the midnight service at church to pray for The Child Christ to give her some fire for her little boy who was shivering while sleeping on a pile of dry leaves.

The little angel saw all of this, and big tears began to drop from his eyes while he began searching in the bottom of his basket. If only at least his hand could find an orange... even a fondant, or a forgotten chocolate... but nothing ! nothing but the remains of pink paper and golden ribbons...

So he had to leave this child without leaving him anything, just the kiss from The Christ Child, something that the poor boy would not remember.

Angels have the power to give dreams, but wouldn't it have been cruel to give this poor one dreams of all sorts of good things, for him to wake up in the morning with empty hands in this cold ?

The little angel was thinking over all this and his tears were running more and more. In his heart he was praying Our Lady to come and help him. Suddenly, while his attention was fixed on the area of dark blue sky through the bedroom window, he had an idea, a marvellous idea. Leaving his basket there to go quicker, he flew towards the first star that was sparkling up there in the sky.

One second later, he was back, beaming, carrying the star carefully between his slim fingers. He put it with great care in the middle of the ashes, under the pan. Then the star started to light the poor





thatched cottage with a beautiful joyful and golden light as one can see only in paradise.

The star spread a warm heat that started to heat the water of the pan, so that it diffused quickly a delicious smell of dessert, because when stars get busy boiling clear water, they communicate to it a good taste, mild with honey, or chocolate, or any other more delicious thing, to the liking of good children.

For one brief instant the little angel gazed at all this well-being, then, after loading his basket on his back, he kissed the child so strongly that this one awoke on his pile of dry leaves.





Shh...Shh... the little angel had just the time to disappear quickly through the bedroom window, because God does not allow angels to show themselves on the earth. This is reserved to heaven.



The little boy awoke only to see the shining star and his mummy who had stopped, very surprised, on the doorstep of the thatched cottage... He started to explain, pointing his finger at the bedroom window:

“ I think that an angel flew away through there, I think I saw a bit of a wing, but I am not completely sure...”

And then his mummy understood everything, because it was Christmas.

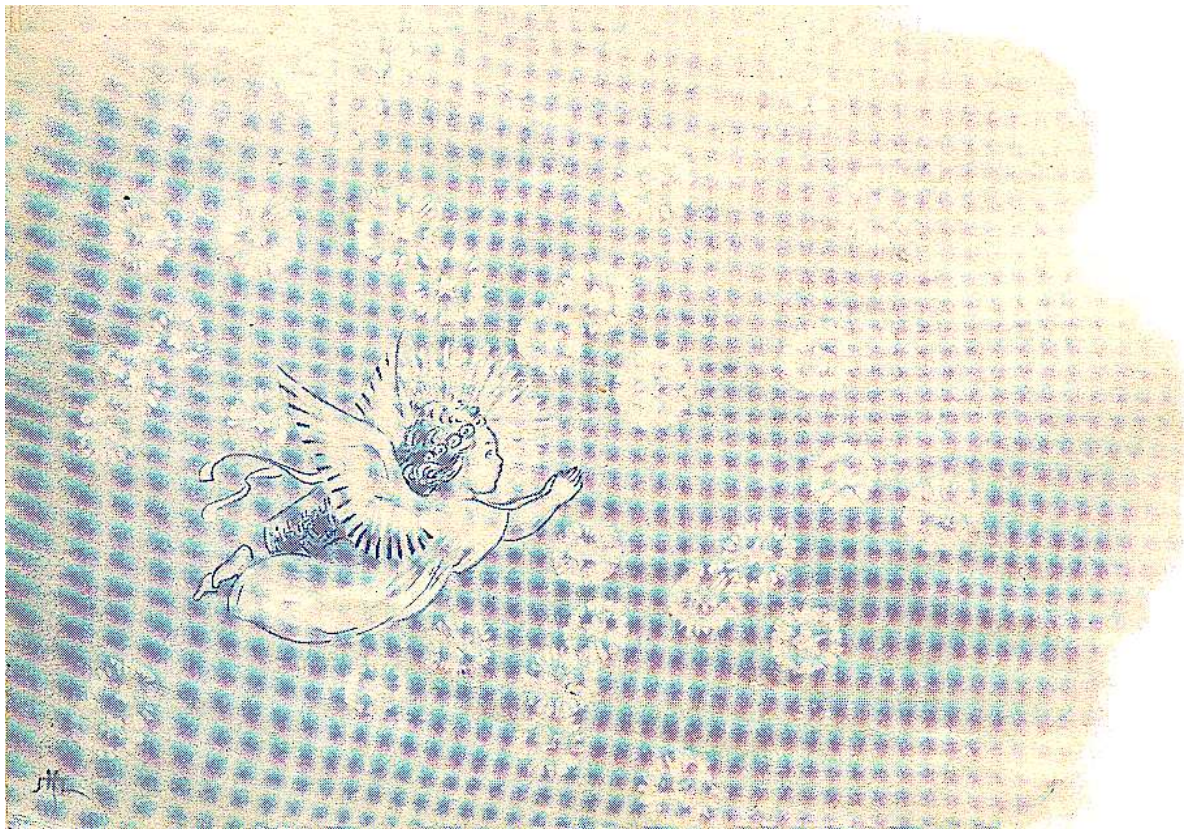


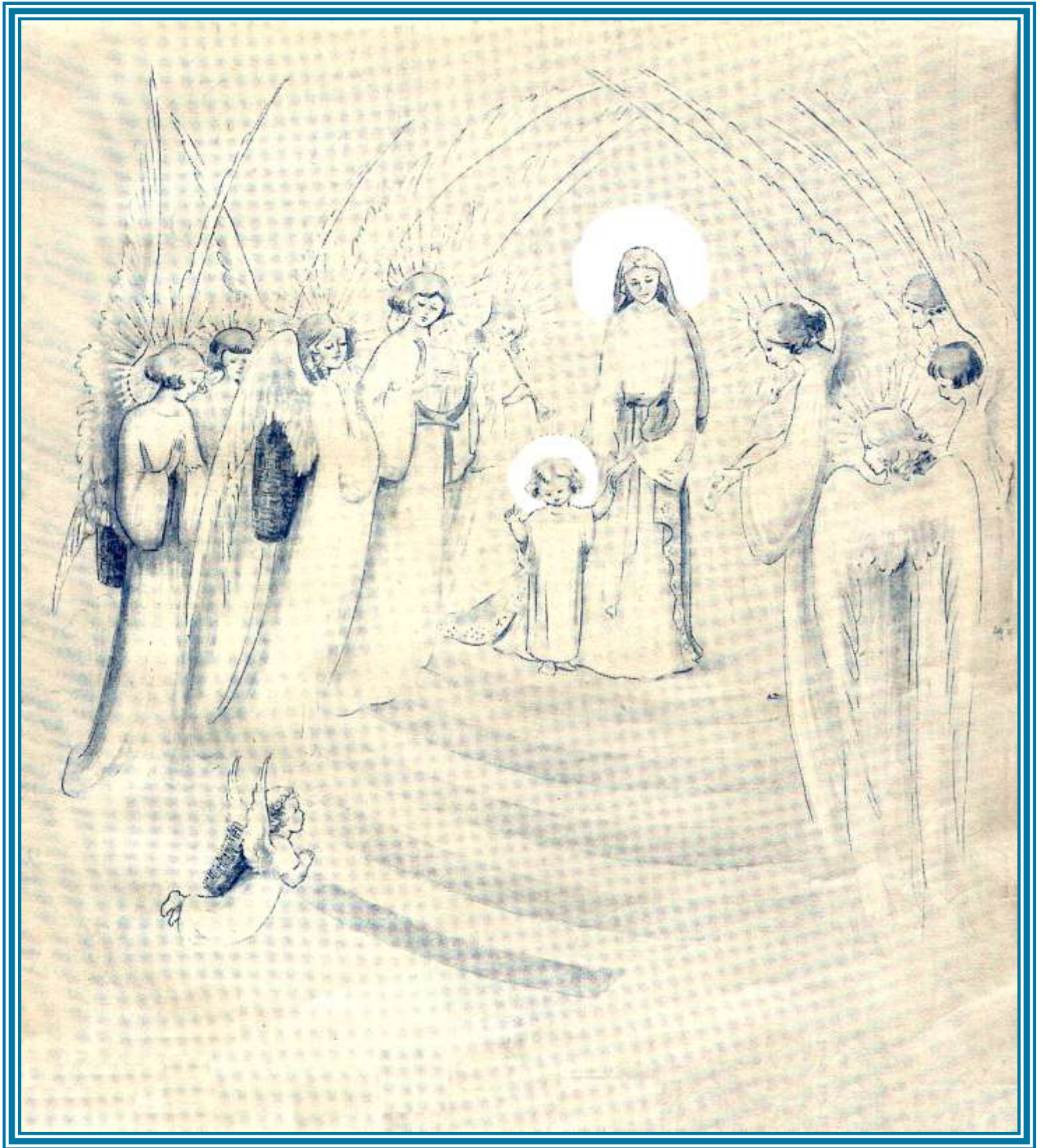
At the same time, the little angel did not have the time to enjoy the happiness he had provided, quickly, quickly, with the whole strength of his wings, he was rising closer up to heaven. He was afraid of being late.

The night was becoming clear. When he arrived on the first of the large steps of the palace entrance, all the big angels were already gathered around Our Lady who had come to wait for her Son.

"You nearly kept us waiting, my little angel," said The Christ Child, pointing his finger at him.

But he was smiling, and the little angel saw that he was not angry; feeling reassured, he followed the white cortege going into paradise.

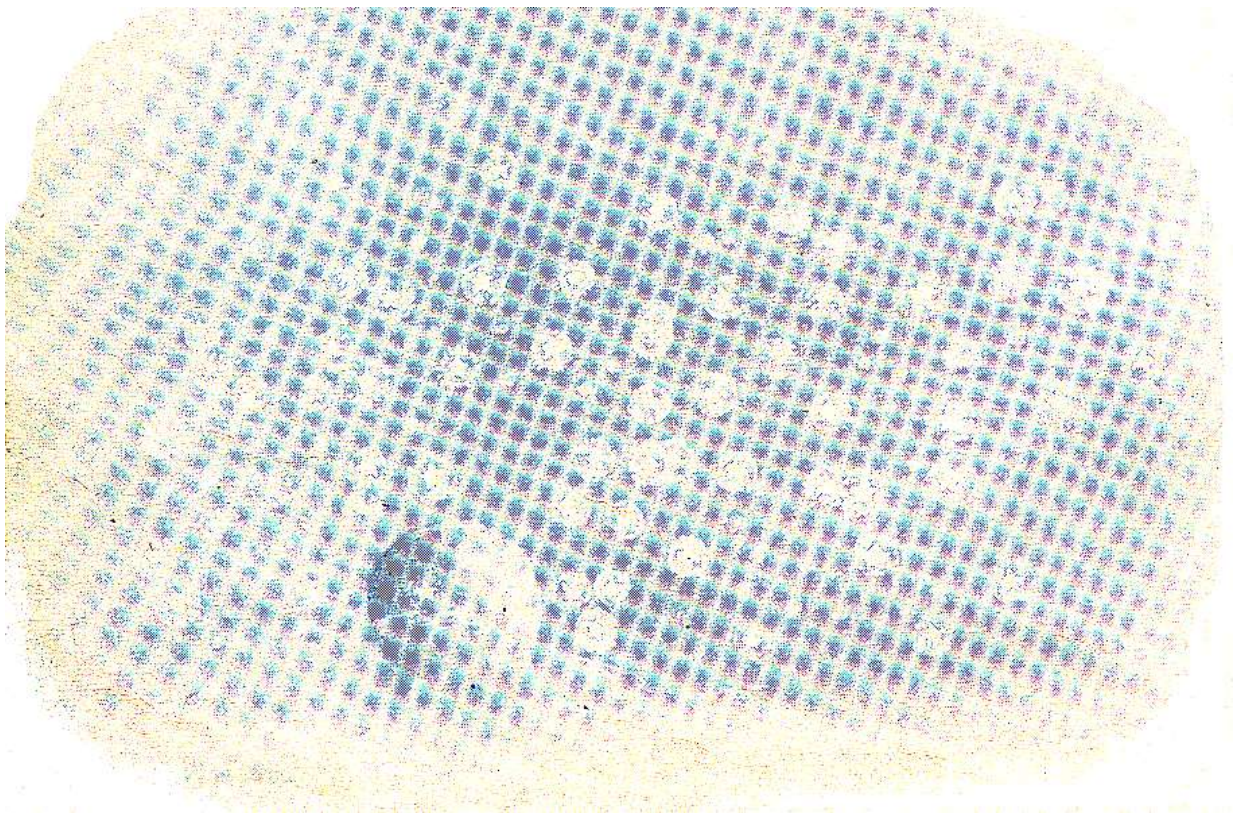




At the moment he passed through the big golden door, he wanted to have a last glance at the way he had been through. Then, with a start, he stopped on the door step.

Up there, towards the earth, among all the stars which were like perfect embroidery in the blue of the sky... a place was empty, and one could see it... There was... yes, there was a hole... a star was missing and it was he, the little angel, who had taken it out.

Christ Child had not seen this while coming up, but God was going to see it immediately. Watching his sky of stars, he would see that one had been damaged in it. He would ask, with his grave voice, "Who did this ?" and it would be him! Him, the little angel, who was responsible.



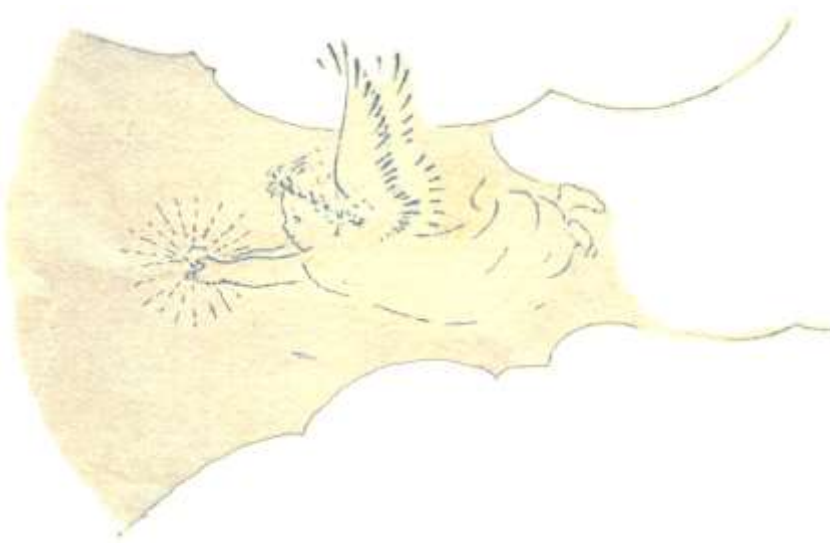


Nevermore would he be allowed to go down on the earth again to see the little children who look like him. First, he had almost forgotten the sweetest child, then to rectify his omission, he had allowed himself to undo God's work, - him, the little angel. The poor angel was still shedding tears on the last step while Saint Peter was grumbling to make him hurry in, because he wanted to close the door, but the poor one was crying even more and more.

Happily, his despair attracted Our Lady, who does not like to hear crying in paradise. In the midst of his tears, the cherub could not explain his pain, but he pointed his finger at the hole done by him in the stars of God, and Our Lady understood. She did not scold him.

As She sees everything which happens with the children of the earth, maybe She was watching at this moment the little boy on earth who was warming with his mother, eating good soup with a dessert taste. She smiled, more beautiful than ever, and taking a star which had been bordering her coat, she put it between the hands of the little angel, who was suddenly comforted.

"Go," She told him tenderly, "go and put it back there quick, I am waiting for you."



And while the little angel was flying away, she was blessing his wings for them to go faster. They were so quick that one instant later, the little angel, radiant, was back in paradise.

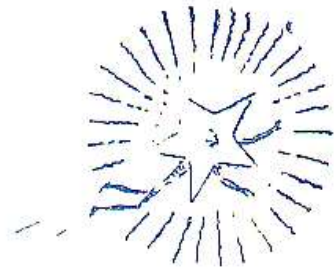


Now, there towards the earth, the star of Our Lady was shining. Shining more than all the other stars, so beautiful, so sparkling, that God certainly recognized her, but he did not say anything... may one say anything to our Lady?

Humans also recognized her, they called her "The Morning Star" - *Stella matutina*. – She is the first one that lights herself and the last one to fade. She is bigger and more beautiful than all the other ones, because She is Our Lady's star.







Here, the small flying star stopped her account: "I like this story very much," Mimi said, "but the star of the little boy, what happened to her?"

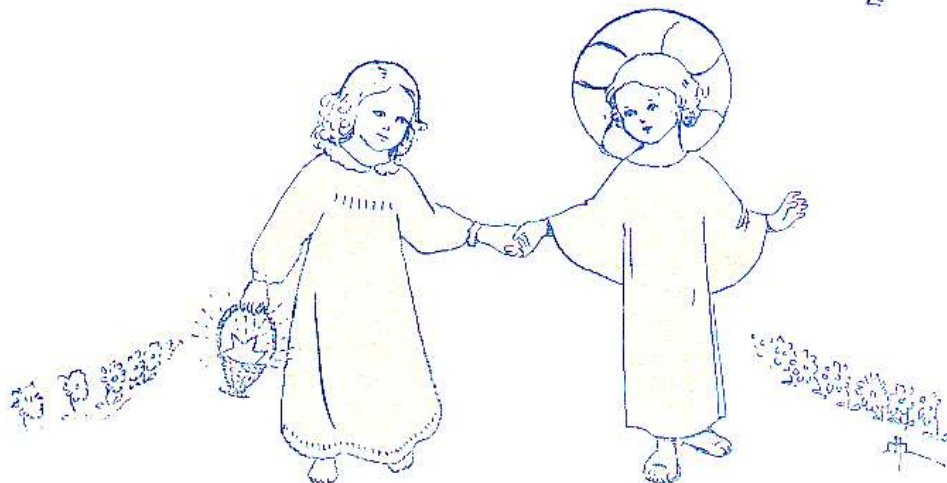
- "She stayed to heat the soup and cook it in the house until the little boy was grown up enough to earn his living and support his mummy."

- "And then?"

- "Then, during one Christmas night, the star went up back to the sky, and as she has not her place there anymore, she is still running... so much so that people now call her the small flying star... and that's me," the star said humbly, bowing.

- "Ah!" Little Mimi said, admiring, "I should have guessed."

But as the star was feeling like running again in the sky, she sparkled slightly, which has the effect of closing the eyes of children, and little Mimi fell asleep. She dreamt that she was walking in the gardens of heaven, holding The Christ Child's hand, and that Our Lady was giving her a star in a golden basket...



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