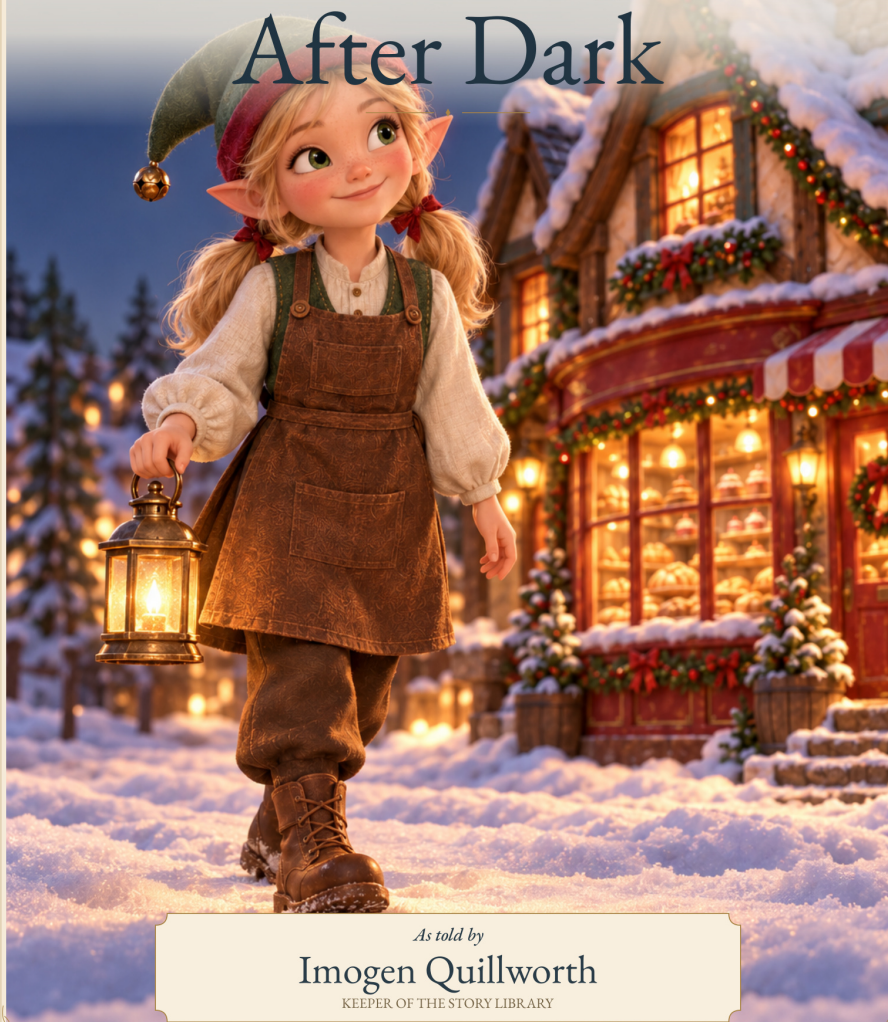



Santa's Workshop

ADVENTURES FROM THE NORTH POLE

BOOK 03

The Village After Dark



As told by

Imogen Quillworth

KEEPER OF THE STORY LIBRARY

The Village After Dark

Told by Imogen Quillworth

Keeper of the Story Library

SantasWorkshop Press

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The Missing Blue



Nellie reached the Christmas tree before anyone else, with a lantern in one hand and her invitation in the other.

All afternoon she had been thinking of the little piece of blue sky she and Jasper had found between two roofs. Tonight she would show it to her neighbours. They would bring discoveries of their own, and afterwards they could tell one another about them at Miss Bramble's Bakehouse.

She looked up.

The roofs were there. The gap was there.

The blue had gone.

Above Lantern Square, the sky was turning the same deep grey as the chimney pots. Nellie held her painted invitation a little closer to the lantern. Its yellow light, six stars and small bun looked wonderfully cheerful.

She wished she had looked at the sky before painting it.

“Am I early?” Jasper asked.

He came across the cobbles with his own lantern and a pencil tucked safely in his pocket.

“Exactly on time,” said Nellie. “My sky is late.”

Jasper followed her gaze.

“It might have stars in it soon.”

“It might. But I invited everyone for now.”

Penny arrived next, her work at North Pole Post finished for the day. Then came Mr. Puddlesworth, carrying a lantern and the invitation on which he had drawn a question mark.

“I have brought a very large question,” he announced.

“Does it need carrying?” Jasper asked.

“Fortunately, it fits in my pocket.”

Miss Bramble joined them last. She had seen the notice beside the tree and finished her baking in time for a short walk.

“I thought I might find something I don’t usually stop for,” she said.

Five lanterns gathered in a loose circle. Nellie tucked her invitation away.

“There’s a lovely piece of sky this way.”

She led them a little way across the square. The snow at its edge crunched under her boots. She stopped where the gap between the roofs opened above her.

Everyone looked.

There was a narrow strip of darkness between two larger strips of darkness.

“It was blue,” Nellie said.

“A very good blue,” Jasper added.

Penny tilted her head. “I can see where it was.”

That was kind, but Nellie had wanted to show them something they could actually enjoy.

“There’s another view,” she said quickly. “Jasper found it. You can see farther.”

“In daylight,” Jasper said.

Nellie looked at him.

He looked towards the dark beyond the lantern light.

“I’m not sure we can see it now.”

She had pictured everyone stopping, pointing and saying, “Look at that!” Instead, they were waiting beside her, holding their lanterns while she searched for the view she remembered.

“Perhaps if we hurry,” she said.

She took three quick steps.

Crunch. Crunch. Crunch.

Then she stopped.

Behind her, the other boots stopped too.

For a moment there was no crunching at all.

Nellie looked down at the small bright patch around her feet.

“Could we wait here a moment?”

She didn’t look towards the missing view. She listened.

A Very Tall Jasper



Nellie put one boot into the untouched snow beside the cobbles.

Crunch.

Then she stepped on a bare stone.

Tap.

“That’s what I heard,” she said.

Mr. Puddlesworth studied her boot.

“An excellent boot. Have you discovered the other one?”

“The sound,” Nellie said, smiling. “Listen when I change where I step.”

Crunch. Tap. Crunch.

Penny tried it. Her heel made a sharper little click on the cobble.

“Mine answers yours.”

Nellie made a crunch. Penny made a click. Jasper added a long, careful squeak where his sole pressed into the snow.

He looked down in surprise.

“That one took a while.”

Miss Bramble tried a small step of her own. The snow broke softly beneath it.

Mr. Puddlesworth raised his boot, ready to contribute. Everyone waited.

He put it down on the cobbles.

Tap.

“A short speech,” he said. “I thought we’d had enough long ones.”

Nellie laughed.

They were still in the same square. They had hardly walked anywhere.

“I’d like that for my discovery,” Penny said. “All our different feet.”

Nellie felt her shoulders loosen.

“You can have it. We can each choose something new.”

They had come round behind the wooden noticeboard. Nellie held her lantern low beside her knee. Jasper stepped between the light and the board, and a shadow slid across its plain wooden back.

Jasper’s shadow.

Its hat reached much higher than his own. When he raised one hand, an enormous shadow hand appeared beside it.

“Jasper,” Nellie said, “you’ve grown.”

He looked at the board behind him.

“Only on one side.”

He lifted both arms. The shadow lifted its arms too.

Mr. Puddlesworth looked from Jasper to the much taller shape on the board.

“Will you need a larger coat?”

“Two larger sleeves, at least.”

Jasper lowered his arms and turned towards Nellie’s lantern. She moved it a little to the side. His shadow swung across the board.

“May I try something?” he asked.

“Go on.”

He stepped farther from her lantern, towards the board. The shadow grew smaller. Then he stepped nearer the lantern, and his shadow’s pointed hat stretched upwards again.

Nellie held the light steady while he moved once more.

“There,” he said. “It changes when I move. I thought you were doing all the growing.”

“I was helping.”

He stopped between the lantern and the board, smiling at his enormous pointed hat on the wood.

“I choose that.”

“Your hat?”

“My very tall hat. I don’t have to carry the extra bit.”

Nellie looked at the lantern in her own hand. She had brought it to light the way to the things she remembered. It was making something she hadn't thought of at all.

"Let's keep our lights low enough to see the ground," she said. "And walk slowly."

They went round the edge of the square together. Nobody hurried towards the hidden view.

Miss Bramble stopped beside a patch of snow that looked smooth from where Nellie stood.

"Would you bring your light here?" she asked.

Nellie held it to one side. Small ridges appeared, with dark lines tucked underneath them.

"Boot marks," Miss Bramble said. "I nearly walked straight over them."

Some were wide and some were narrow. One print had a clear zigzag in its sole. In another, snow had fallen into the toe.

Miss Bramble followed the marks with her eyes.

"Someone stopped here and turned round. Look. Two toes pointing back."

Nellie could see them now.

"I wonder what they went back for," Jasper said.

"Their other question," Mr. Puddlesworth suggested.

Miss Bramble smiled. "I couldn't tell you. But I like seeing where they changed their mind."

She chose the turned footprints. They left them undisturbed and walked on.

Ahead, a warm rectangle of light lay across the snow.

“Oh,” said Nellie.

She knew which window it came from.

The Light on the Snow



Miss Bramble's Bakehouse window glowed at the edge of the square.

In daylight, Nellie could see the things inside it. Now the light reached out across the snow. Thin shadows from the window frame divided it into bright squares.

Nellie stood just beyond them.

She had walked past this window before. She had never stopped to look at what it put on the ground.

Mr. Puddlesworth stepped into the light. His lantern's yellow glow was fainter here.

He looked down at its glass, then back at the window.

“Mine is still lit,” he said.

He moved out of the bright rectangle. The lantern’s small circle showed clearly around his boots again.

He stepped in. He stepped out.

“There’s my discovery. The little light shows up better in the dark.”

“We can still see you in both places,” Penny said.

“Good. I’d hate to be misplaced.”

Nellie laughed, then looked into the window.

Her own lantern appeared in the glass.

She held it a little higher. The reflected lantern rose too. Behind it, she could see a tray on the counter inside.

“It looks as if I’ve put my lantern beside your tray,” she told Miss Bramble.

“Have you?”

Nellie lifted her empty hand and showed it.

“I haven’t even opened the door.”

She moved the lantern sideways. Its reflection travelled across the glass, passing over the tray. When she lowered it, the small reflected light disappeared below the window.

She raised it again.

There it was.

“That’s mine,” she said. “A lantern in the window that I’m still holding out here.”

She tried the movement once more, slowly. Jasper watched without adding a grander discovery.

The little lantern seemed to visit the Bakehouse before her.

Her own discovery shone in the glass.

“Would you like to come inside?” Miss Bramble asked. “I’ve finished for the evening.”

They did.

Nellie let the others pass, then took one last look from the doorway. Her reflection had moved out of sight. The bright squares still lay on the snow.

Inside, they set their lanterns safely aside. Miss Bramble brought a plate of buns to the counter, and Jasper put his spare paper where everyone could reach it.

Penny drew a boot. Miss Bramble drew two small footprints facing back the way they had come. Jasper began a hat, reached the edge of his paper and cheerfully carried it onto a second sheet.

“That is an inconvenient hat,” Nellie said.

“Fortunately, it’s only an evening hat.”

Mr. Puddlesworth took out his invitation. Beside its question mark, he drew two little circles, one pale and one dark, with a lantern in each.

Nellie drew her window. She put a little lantern in the glass, and another beside it to show where her hand had been.

Then she added the tray behind the reflected light.

“I didn’t know I was inviting you to see any of those things,” she said.

“Neither did we,” Penny replied.

Miss Bramble placed the last bun on the plate and came to look at their drawings.

Outside, snow began to fall through the window light. Nellie watched a few flakes turn gold, then disappear below the sill.

She slid her unfinished drawing a little to one side.

“I’m going to watch this bit first.”