

*Marguerite de Angeli*



*The  
Lion in the Box*

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Lion in the Box*



*Marguerite de Angeli*

Purple House Press  Kentucky

TO  
MY FRIEND LILI GALEN,  
WHOSE COUNSEL AND FRIENDSHIP  
MEAN SO MUCH TO ME  
AND TO ALL WHO KNOW HER,  
WITH LOVE.

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Summary: The author recounts the true events of a special Christmas for a family without much money, in New York City at the turn of the 20th century.

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## Foreword

This is a true story. That is, in essence it is true. The episodes were told me by my friend Lili Galen. Of course, it is fictionalized to make a story and—because I wasn't there! I feel, though, as if I had walked up the steps to the flat and had moved around in the rooms. I believe there wasn't a courtyard, but that is the way I saw it and it doesn't matter.

I invented the neighbors' names, but Mrs. McAlister was a real person and so was the one called Miss Von Tipple. Mrs. Stix, too, was a real person, whose generosity created *The Lion in the Box*.

Mike McGuire's name was invented because, in these days it would not be safe to open the door to a stranger. But then, in 1901, the streets were safe. The paper stars made by the girls in the story are the invention of Mr. Lloyd Hertzler, who gave some to me and allowed me to use them in this way. He also gave me a pattern and explained how they are made. He takes the material to hospitals and teaches the patients to make them. He works especially with children and older people who need something to do. The star is called The Lloyd Three-Dimensional Star.

Mr. Robert Dawson, of Stix, Baer and Fuller, of St. Louis, Missouri, gave me permission to use their name in the book.

I wish to thank Lili Galen and Lloyd Hertzler for their kindness and help.

*Marguerite de Angeli*

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*Foxy Grandpa* pin, circa 1900.  
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## *Chapter One*

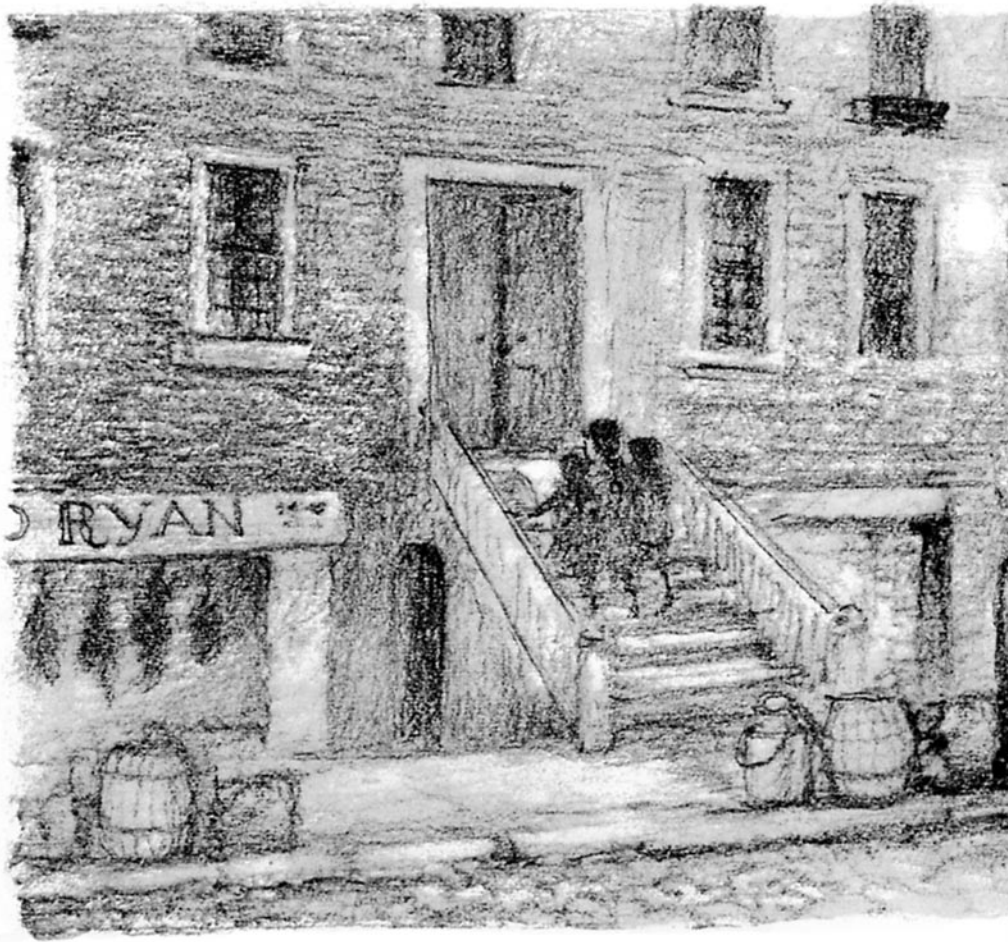
Betty and Rosie came along from school with Lili trailing after them. Lili had to stop at every shop window to look at dolls. Mama had made her a doll from a folded tea towel, with a safety pin to hold it in place.

Lili loved her. The only trouble was, she had to be held very gingerly, or she collapsed. How Lili longed for a *real* doll, a doll with flaxen hair and rosy cheeks. There was such a doll in Kratz's window, but of course Lili wouldn't even ask for it because she knew Mama couldn't afford to buy it. But Lili looked for it every time she passed the window.

It was only a few days before Christmas. There had been a program at school and Lili had recited *The Night Before Christmas*. Betty had sung "O, Holy Night." Rosie was very proud of them. Rosie had helped the teacher clean the black board so that Betty could print MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL. Betty was good at lettering and drawing.

There would be no more school until the New Year.

It was a cold, gray day and a cold, gray street, but Mama



said, "It's your inside weather that counts." Sometimes she said, "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance." And it was true. If you turned up the corners of your mouth, you just couldn't help smiling!

The girls pranced along, half walking, half dancing. They passed neighbors and friends: Mr. O'Shaughnessy, the policeman at the corner, Mr. Trout, who sometimes came to see them and tell stories. They passed Ginsburg's Dry Goods Store, the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church,



the tailor shop, the grocery and Mr. Ryan's Butcher Shop. Sometimes, the girls walked home by another street so they could see all the things for sale on the pushcarts. But today, they had to hurry on home.

It was trash day. Baskets of trash lined the curb, awaiting the horse-drawn wagon coming behind them. As the girls neared home, Betty spied a whole Sunday newspaper with the funnies on top of a trash barrel. "*Foxy Grandpa!*" she cried joyfully, thrusting her books into Rosie's arms on top

of her own and picking the paper up. Here was a treasure. The Sunday newspaper or any newspaper was not easily come by. Mama had to watch every penny. Sometimes, Mr. Ryan would remember to save his paper for the girls, but he often forgot.

Rosie and Lili crowded close to Betty, the better to see *Foxy Grandpa* as they went up the steps and into the flat.

Mama was away at work today and Miss Von Tipple was taking care of Ben and Sooch. Mama didn't work every day, only occasionally. She usually worked at night, cleaning offices on Madison Avenue, when the girls were at home to care for the little ones.

Every night when Mama left for work, she took each child by the hand, looked into the wide eyes and said, "I trust you, my child, to be good and to do the things I have told you."

To Sooch and to Ben, she said, "Mind the girls and don't be naughty."

And to the girls, "Take good care of my little ones. Keep the house neat and clean. Betty, remember, you are the mother."

"Yes, Mama, we will be good," Ben and the girls all said. Sooch just nodded her head and reached up for a kiss.

Sometimes, Mrs. McAlister or one of the other ladies of the church came to stay with the younger children if Mama had to work in the daytime and the girls were in school. A



Lili

group of women from the church, who called themselves The Partners, gave their time to those in need. And Mama was certainly in need of help. There were five children to be fed and clothed and cared for. Betty was eleven, Rosie, nine, Lili, seven and Ben, five. Sooch was just a baby, one and a half.

Papa was gone. "He is in the Great Beyond," Mama explained.

To Lili, the Great Beyond was somewhere beyond the East River where big ships boo-oomed their passing. Maybe, even beyond that! Maybe where the sun rose. It was hard to imagine.

“Hello, girls,” Miss Von Tipple greeted them as they came in. “Now that you’re here, I’ll go along home. Your mama will be here soon and I’ve left you some milk and cookies.”

“How nice!” the girls answered her greeting, taking up first Sooch, then Ben to hug. All was confusion for a moment while the girls put away their books and Miss Von Tipple told how good the younger children had been. The girls told her about the program at school, nibbling on cookies and looking at *Foxy Grandpa*, where Betty had spread the paper out on the floor.

Miss Von Tipple put on her hat and coat. “I gave Ben and Sooch a good lunch. They will be all right till your mama comes home.” She opened the door, “Good-by, children, be good. You know Christmas is almost here!” She smiled at Lili who stood near the door and winked.

The children knew about Christmas from hearing Mama tell about the tree they always had in Austria when she was a girl, and about the gifts given to friends to celebrate the good harvest. But Miss Von Tipple had given it a new meaning. She had told them the story of Bethlehem, of the young mother, Mary, and of “No Room at the Inn.” Lili loved the story and thought about it often. She could just see the baby in the manger, the beasts standing by, their breath warming the stable. She could see the bright star and the shepherds on the hills.

Rosie had already lost herself in a book and Betty lay on her stomach reading the funnies. “Oh!” she exclaimed, “I’m going to do it! I’m going to do it right *now!*” Rosie looked up.

“Do *what?*” Rosie and Lili spoke at once.

“See? Here it says that if you fill in the Foxy Grandpa pictures with color, you can get a *pin* with Foxy Grandpa’s picture on it. Look!” The girls all read the directions. Ben looked, too, and Sooch said, “Pin?”

Out came the colored crayons and everybody watched while Betty colored the drawings. They watched while she wrote a letter to go with the drawings, and found an envelope in the big chest. She also wrote, “P.S. I have three sisters and a brother. Please send five pins with Foxy Grandpa on them. Thank you.”

“Now,” she said as she licked the flap, “it’s all ready for Mama to put a stamp on it and mail it.” She could already imagine the Foxy Grandpa pins and see how she would pin each one on at the throat. She clapped her hands.

“Now, we must get to work. We must make chains from this newspaper for the tree Mama promised us.”

Rosie brought scissors and paste and they set to work. Ben played with his train and Sooch played with the scraps of paper. Betty did the cutting of the paper, Rosie the folding and Lili the pasting. There was quite a length of chain by the time dark began to creep into the room.



Betty got up to light the lamp. "Put away the paper chains," she said. "It's time to get supper. Mama will soon be home and you know she hasn't much time before she must go to work again."

Mama had started the soup when she came home last midnight. She cooked the bones all night, then cooled the broth and skimmed off all the fat, then added every vegetable she could find. At the last moment, she added a handful of oatmeal, "to give it body," she said.

Mr. Ryan, the butcher next door, saved beef and veal bones for Mama sometimes, leaving a little meat on them. When the children ate the soup with Mama's homemade "bilke," it was like a feast. A "bilke" is a small, round loaf of hard crusty bread, and each child had one of their own.

When Lili had set the bowls on the table and the soup was hot, Mama came in. Her arms were full of bundles and she was shivering with cold.

"Brrrr! How good the fire feels and how good the soup smells. Ummm!" She set the bundles down and took off her worn coat and shabby hat and laid a roll of paper carefully on the chest.

"I wish I could stay home tonight," she said. "I've got a secret to tell you."

"Oh, tell us! Tell us," the children cried, crowding around her, Sooch reaching up for her share of attention. Mama

took Sooch in her arms. "I'm still so cold I'm afraid to hold you. Here, we'll stand close to the stove."

Lili put the chairs around the table. They were not all alike. Mama had picked them up, one here, one there as she passed the secondhand carts along the way when she had a little extra money. The bowls, now filled with soup, were of precious china. They were different one from another too, as Mama had seen them on the pushcarts. Mama had an eye for good things.

As they sat down to supper, Lili urged Mama to tell the secret.

"It's something I have to show you how to do. Let's have our supper. Then I will take time to show you. It's something Mr. Lloyd told me about. You know who Mr. Lloyd is don't you?"

Lili nodded. "I know," she said. "He's the man in that office where you work sometimes in the daytime, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's the man who has that big office. I think he is the head of a manufacturing business. Sometimes when I've been there, men come from faraway cities to order things. One time, about two weeks ago, a man from St. Louis came and brought his wife to see New York. She was a nice lady. She talked to me for a long time while her husband was busy with Mr. Lloyd. I was dusting the books in the outer office. Yes, she was a nice woman. Her name was Mrs. Stix."