

## ***A Scene by Candlelight***

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Abe stirred, his head lay deep in his pillow; something had disturbed him. Sleep blurred, he turned over, his arm stretching for Muriel; she wasn't there, the space was empty, never to be refilled.

His eyes, glued with the wax of sleep, could barely open; he shook his head; there it was again; a light flashed on his pupils through his still shuttered eye lids. Abe raised his head, and wiped his eyes. A weak light flashed around the room, "must be traffic" he thought, then remembered closing the curtains before bed.

Abe's brain was slowly struggling to wakefulness. That light; again. It seemed to be circling the room. Awake now, he lifted up on to his elbows. The light seemed to be getting stronger; it flickered like a draught blown candle, steadied, then came to rest between the window and the fireplace. Slowly the glow intensified, the flame swaying away from the closed window as though carried on a light breeze.

"Surely not Muriel come back," he thought.

Gradually it began to grow taller and taller; a golden shape seemed to form within the flame and transformed into a transparent long figure of a man writing in a golden book with a golden quill, at a golden table. Suddenly two large cathedral candles appeared and circled the room coming to rest, one at each side of the table.

Abe raised himself on his elbows; his mouth parched, he raised a trembling hand to his lips. His deep sleep had imbued him

with a strange confidence. His fear receding, he leaned towards the figure and said, "What are you writing?"

The apparition raised his head, and with a kindly look that absorbed all his senses replied, "The names of those who love the Lord."

Abe swallowed hard. "Ah," he said. "and mine, are you writing mine?"

The apparition shook his head, "No, I'm afraid not."

Abe paused disconsolately, and then with a broad cheerful smile said, "Please, please, then write me as loving mankind."

The apparition wrote, and then the scene vanished. Abe collapsed on the bed. "'t's a dream, it's a dream," he muttered, his head whirling in wonderment.

The sharp buzz of the alarm clock startled him into reality. He glanced at the clock; seven thirty already. His eyes registered the white dog collar circling the clock. Time to move: hospital visiting this morning - ninety five year old Mrs Simpson, a lifelong church member and on her last legs; the Women's Guild this afternoon; the men's prayer meeting tonight, his sermon for Sunday. "I'd better get a move on," he thought jumping out of bed.

At 10.30 p.m. Abe dropped back into bed and immediately fell into a deep sleep of total exhaustion, but at about 2 a.m. he began to stir. He looked at the clock. It was spinning. The whole room was spinning around. As it began to slow down the window started to glow with a golden light. Large cathedral candles grew high from the floor; the apparition slowly materialised between them and beckoned to him. Nervously Abe made his way to the golden table. The Apparition, with his golden quill pointed to the open page, which was headed:

*The Names of Those the Lord has Blessed*

Abe's name was in bold letters across the head of the page.

Abe Ben Adhem led all the rest.

The Apparition smiled, patted him on the shoulder, and vanished. Darkness encompassed the room.

Abe's head was buzzing as he struggled from sleep. The alarm clock was ringing, his bleary eyes focussed. Seven thirty again. And suddenly he felt bright and alert, energized, ready for the day. Today, he felt, he really could love his Lord. Mrs. Simpson first stop.

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