

'How It Happened' — a sweet vintage Christmas romance

By Cheryl Hoefler
GO! Magazine

Not sure “how it happened” that I even ended up with this vintage book in my possession, but a sweet charming story it is.

Written in 1914, “How It Happened” by Kate Langley Boshier is a Christmas-season romance — an early-day Hallmark Christmas tale if there ever was one.

The lovers are Stephen Van Landing, a well-to-do, friendless, cold businessman, and Frances Barbour, a lowly, kindhearted woman who devotes her time and energy to needy children. Both are alone — and lonely. But they used to be a couple, engaged in fact, until she called it off when she learned his opinion was that a wife should be devoted to her husband and home — and not much else. They parted, he to an “up-town”

life, she to the “down-town” side.

That was three years ago and their paths never crossed again. We learn, however, that secretly both have regretted their broken engagement and have longed for each other ever since.

And then a young, imaginative girl named Carmencita Bell comes into their lives. Carmencita, from the poverty-stricken “down-town,” is already good friends with her neighbor “Miss Barbour.” Then by chance one evening, she meets a gentleman, “Mr. Van.” It’s two days before Christmas and he’s wandering the streets in a sour mood about the holiday: “It was humanity’s home-time and he had no home.”

Carmencita’s waiting for her blind, widower father, who’s providing music at a neighborhood wedding — a

wedding that, you guessed it, Van Landing is supposed to be attending. It really could be a Hallmark Christmas movie.

Soon into their acquaintance, Stephen is stunned to learn that his new young friend knows his dear Frances. But, alas, the reclusive and elusive Frances is nowhere to be found. In his despair, Stephen strikes out again for the dark and dreary streets, in a mad search for his love. He considers heading back to Carmencita’s home, but realizes he doesn’t even know her full name or address. Nor, unfortunately, does Carmencita know his.

How in the world are these two onetime lovebirds ever going to find each other again? And can they rekindle their romance?

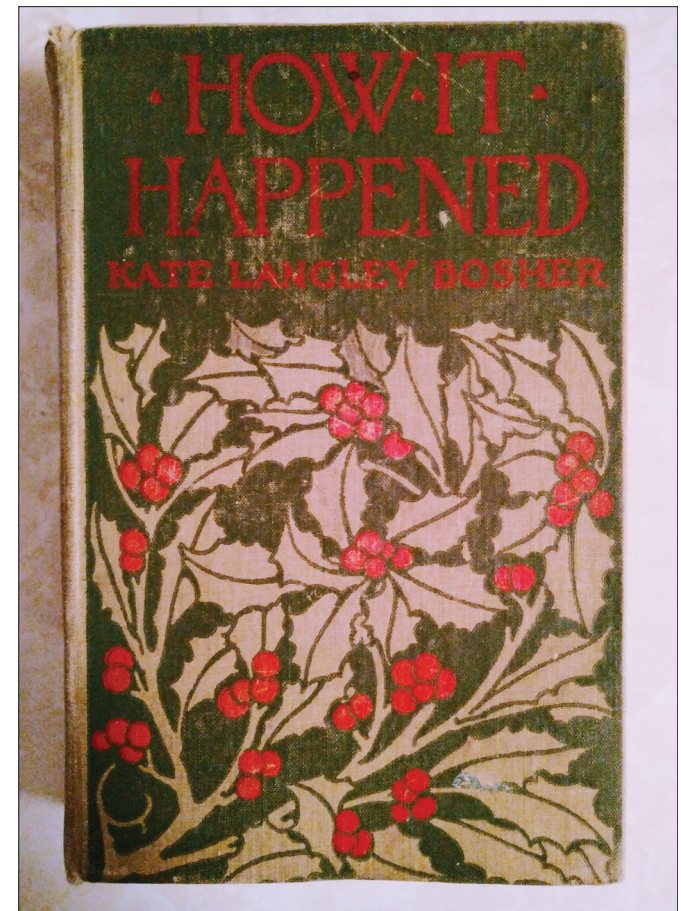
Several other characters fill in the story, some with strange names — Noodles,

Fetch-It and Mr. Dam-anarkist. It took me a few pages to figure out the latter meant “Mr. Damn Anarchist.”

A location for “How It Happened” isn’t given, but author Boshier’s works were often set in her home state of Virginia or the South. Her novel “Mary Cary, Frequently Martha” (1910) was adapted to the silent movie “Nobody’s Kid” (1921).

I enjoyed this pleasant little story and truly could not put it down. Van Landing’s character reminded me of Dickens’ Scrooge, if Scrooge was younger and in love — with something other than money, that is. Like Scrooge, Van Landing comes around and begins to see “what for long had been unseen.”

I was surprised to learn that Christmastime frenzy was alive and well 100 years ago. Van Landing expresses his disgust: “It was incom-



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prehensible, the shopping craze at this season of the year ... commercializing a custom whose origin was very far removed from the spirit of the day.”

In addition to being a lighthearted romance, “How It Happened” offers some deep ponderings on

couples, wealth, poverty and loneliness. And the question of what really drives the incidents in our lives: faith or fate?

For her part, young and insightful Carmencita does not believe in accidents and knows just “how it happened.”

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As a student of Japanese arts and aesthetics, and a student of the study of consciousness, photographer and hypnotherapist Tom Reed is interested in the experience of aesthetic arrest and what he calls “shocking beauty.” (See his TEDx presentation on that subject) Zen sensibilities profoundly influence his compositions. Other major influences on his work have been Ansel Adams, Edgar Payne’s work in the Sierras, and the Hudson River School of painters. Indeed he was nicknamed “The Ansel Adams of Patagonia” after his book, *The Granite Avatars of Patagonia*. His work can be seen at www.tomreed.com.

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