

# *Sketch*

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## I Heard The Children Singing

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# I Heard The Children Singing

Ted Doty

## **Abstract**

The bright sun reflecting off the bleached mud and stone walls gave the impression of white heat and made the stench of burro dung and garbage thick in the narrow little street...

## *I Heard The Children Singing*

*“Last night I lay asleeping, there came a dream so fair. I stood in old Jerusalem, beside the temple there. I heard the children singing, and ever as they sang . . . .”*

THE bright sun reflecting off the bleached mud and stone walls gave the impression of white heat and made the stench of burro dung and garbage thick in the narrow little street. Acrid smoke drifted through the heavy air from the little stove made of an old iron barrel. Two ears of over-ripe corn crackled on top of the coals as the dirty little man fanned at them with an old piece of cardboard that had been the lid on a CARE package.

The man's face was wrinkled with the wisdom of many years. His clothes, his hair, his skin, everything about him seemed to carry the grimy dirt of many weeks. He squated on leathery feet, fanning the fire with one hand and absent-ly scratching his scaley legs with the other hand. Occasionally he made a pass at the flies that persistantly tried to get at the open sore on his leg.

The old man sang a weary song that seemed to express all that the wrinkles of his face could not. It pulsed high and then low, hinted of some secret joy, and then affirmed some great sorrow. It was not a loud song, but it was as sure and constant as the hand that fanned the small charcoal fire under the crackling ears of corn.

Not far away a small boy sat naked, dangling his feet into the gutter. His hands and face were busily occupied with the task of getting the charred kernels off an ear of corn that had long since lost any heat that it might have gained from the small charcoal fire. His large bony feet were busy playing in the slimy mixture of water and chicken intestines. The dirt was pushed up in little rolls on his skinny legs

where the water had splashed up on them and revealed queer little creamy patches under the blue film which covered his body. He threw down the barron cob, frightening a sparrow which had been dusting itself in the sand between the cobblestones, and sang a childish song into the muck at his feet.

Down the street a way a tiny girl reached above her head to spin the crank of the cast-iron water hydrant across from the charcoal stove. Her mother beat a small wad of clothes against the cobblestones that had been washed clean below the hydrant. She arranged them into a long bunch, lifted them over her head, and then brought them whacking down onto the stones again. Up, down, up, down, up, down. A steady rhythm, pounding, pounding, with the virtuoso squeak of the spinner crank on the pump.

A butcher down the street sang out in a strong voice trying to attract the people to his shop. Parts of several carcasses dangled in the sun in his open shop and flies buzzed hungrily around them. Two small boys played tug-o-war with an old ox tail on the floor. Their melodious laughter drifted through the singing of the flies and was lost into the songs in the street.

*“. . . and ever as they sang, methought the voice of angels from Heaven in answer rang.”*

— Ted Doty, *F.T. & S., Jr.*



## *Hot Chow*

I HAD been standing in the line for over four hours before I could see what was happening in front of the mess tent. My jaws ached in anticipation. The very thought of hot chow, the first for three weeks! I swallowed and swallowed saliva. There were men running in and out of the tent bringing hot steaming containers to the serving line.