

"Merry Christmas, Lizzie; same to you, Jean. Come on into the house, both of ye," and he bowed obsequiously as he opened the door of the manor and allowed them to pass in.

"Well, I declare, my fire's gone out. Just one moment though and ——. "Never mind, uncle," Jean interrupted, "Lizzie's come over to our house for Christmas and mother sent us both up to bring you down."

"Yes, Will, and we had strict orders not to be late, so we had better start right away," said Lizzie.

"Why, all right," replied Bill, "I'll go and hitch up old Nell," and off he went to the stable.

"I say, Jean, let's tidy up a little while he's gone," broke out Lizzie as soon as the door closed on Bill's stalwart form.

"Oh yes, Lizzie, let's straighten things around."

The two commenced and in a short time their deft and willing hands had worked wonders in the internal appearance of the manor. They pushed the table to one side and arranged Bill's three chairs in unobtrusive order. Boots and mocassins they placed neatly away. Lizzie administered a hasty polish to the stove, while Jean folded up Bill's *Family Herald*, hung up various articles of attire, and wiped the crumbs off the table. They swept the floor and smoothed down the bed, hung the gun up on its nails and dusted off the chairs and windowsills, arranged the articles on the little shelf over the window and bestowed the cooking utensils in convenient positions.

The jingle of the bells interrupted their labors, and Bill's cheerful "Come on, girls," made them hurry out. They climbed into the cutter, and with a cheerful chorus from the bells they were off through the wood.

Lizzie was a quiet girl, plain and grave in appearance, with eyes that gazed at one with a steadiness that was sometimes disconcerting. She had left twenty some distance behind, and had none of the giddiness of youth. She was just a plain, honest, good-hearted girl, with an abundant supply of common sense. Bill had known her for years. They had always been excellent friends, for Bill had been for a few summers her father's hired man. But somehow to-day she was quieter even than usual, and Bill was left to carry on conversation chiefly with Jean.

"How are the music lessons, Jean?" he enquired.

"Oh, sometimes it's awful hard, uncle. My fingers are so stiff. Then, these sharps and flats! They tumble out of my head as soon as Miss Darrel puts them in. I try hard, too."

"Miss Darrel hard on ye, is she?" he asked.

"Oh, no, she's just lovely! Never gets out of patience with me like the last teacher did. Say, uncle, why don't you cut Nell's tail? It's so long."

"Humph! her tail's all right. Getting a lesson to-day?"

"Why, this is Christmas day, uncle! Preacher says we're all to be at the church to help decorate for the social. I guess Miss Darrel will be there."

"I heard you drove her over from the station, Will. Is she nice?" Lizzie asked.