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Let me talk to you about

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"Phyllis, you know, is my dearest friend and Jack is Percy's chum."

Aunt Sophie only stared stupidly. "You see," her niece went on to explain, "Mother decided not to come home for the present, as her health is not altogether restored; so father has gone to join her for a week at Los Angeles—but Aunt Sophie, you don't mind our coming do you?" this a bit incredulously, for Aunt Sophie's reputation for hospitality was beyond reproach.

The old lady's reply was a relapse into the white apron and Ruth Wilmar stared aghast:

"Why, Auntie, whatever can be the matter?"

"There, Ruth, 'taint nothing, don't you mind me," declared the old lady, but her niece was not to be so easily reassured.

"There's something happened I am sure," she asserted, and added coaxingly, "Come Auntie, do tell me all about it."

And so the story of Aunt Sophie's troubles came out.

Ten minutes later Ruth Wilmar turned again to the snows.

"Good bye, Aunt Sophie," she called back, "I'm going for a stroll. Don't you worry, everything will be lovely, and we shall have a jolly Christmas I promise you."

It must here be explained that Ruth and Percy Wilmar were the children of Aunt Sophie's step-brother, Richard Wilmar, upon whom fate had showered the good things of life with a lavishness beyond all reason.

Ruth's second trip was simply the converse of its predecessor. Back over the trail to the main road, past the school-house and store and into the little station. Stepping up to the wicket, she wrote hastily. The operator, a pale-eyed and over deferential man, received and promptly despatched the message and in less than half an hour's time Percy Wilmar, law student, read the following somewhat alliterative instructions:

"Percy Wilmar, Esq., etc.: Bring two turkeys, trussed: Christmas tree furnishings complete. Seven persons."

How so much was accomplished upon such short notice ever afterwards remained a mystery to the performers themselves. It may have been that some of the sender's enthusiasm was transmitted with the message, but certain it is that never before was a two-hour shopping tour executed with more satisfactory results.

Having sought out his sister's friend, Miss Phyllis Norwood, young Wilmar successfully solicited that young lady's co-operation. Together they visited every fancy shop and bargain counter attainable, not forgetting the fish and fowl markets, and finally they retreated, bearing parcels of every conceivable size and shape, all too urgent to await delivery.

Late in the afternoon 'twas a merry party that assembled at the ranch of Reuben Vickers. The baggage was left to follow in the cart of a neighboring rancher who had good-naturedly volunteered its delivery.

"Well, my patience!" was Aunt Sophie's half audible comment as she viewed the collection of bags and hampers deposited at her door. If that ain't the most surprising lot of truck to last four people over two days! There ain't no accountin' fer city folks though."

The next day being Christmas, a dainty but unsubstantial lunch was laid for six. Everyone appeared in the best of spirits, save Uncle Reub., whose doleful countenance bespoke his disappointment as he slowly surveyed the table.

"Ain't this, Christmas?" he asked, plaintively, "where's the turkey and stuff?"

Aunt Sophie bristled with indignation and importance. "This ain't dinner," she told him, "It's lunch. Dinner'll come on later."

Thus reassured, Uncle Reuben directed his attention to the ham sandwiches and lemon turnover. Having disposed of these evanescent delicacies, the old man pushed aside his plate with the remark: "Guess I'm done with these; you ken bring on the dinner of you life."

A withering glance from Aunt Sophie fell upon him. "Reuben Vickers," she began, "if you ain't the nimniest man I ever did see. You'll get no bite of dinner till six o'clock, so just content yourself." Subsequently relenting, however,

she placed before him a great mince pie, half of which the old man promptly dispatched with evident satisfaction.

Luncheon cleared away and the dishes duly disposed of, Ruth confronted her aunt with the proposal: "Now, Aunt Sophie, we want you to run off and take a nap. Phyllis and I will attend to everything and you will wake up fresh for the evening."

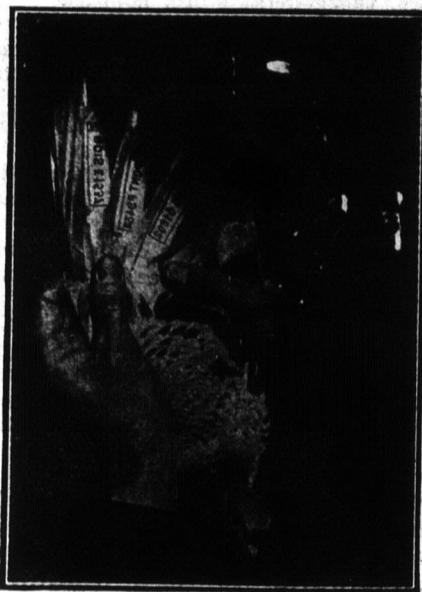
Aunt Sophie protested vigorously, but was finally forced to surrender. The old lady accordingly settled herself with the reflection:

"I'll just lay down a bit and then go and give 'em a hand in the kitchen." Tired nature, however, disposed otherwise, and Aunt Sophie was soon wrapped in a sound slumber. When she again opened her eyes it was half-past five. With a little cry of dismay, the old lady arose. "Why I've only just time," she thought, "to fix up a bit afore they come."

In parlor and kitchen, meanwhile, preparations were steadily progressing and already the young people were reviewing their completed operations when Aunt Sophie made her appearance.

The first arrival was at the door. On the dining-table, in addition to numerous other dishes, two plump turkeys steamed on their platters, filling the room with their fumes of savory sweetness.

Presently they were all seated at the table and just as enthusiasm and good-fellowship were at their height, in came Rob and Tommy, who had managed the



Belgian Carrier Pigeon. Showing method of attaching messages.

trip after all. Extra plates were joyfully provided, and even Sally in her brand new cap and apron, encountering Rob's bashfully adoring glance, was exalted to the seventh heaven of happiness. And so, amid laughter and feasting, time sped with lightning swiftness. The great clock in the hall pealed forth its eight notes of warning, whereupon everyone arose and a general procession was headed for the parlor. The door opened, revealing such a blaze of lights and gleam of colors as never before was witnessed at Black Thorn. What a volley of "Ohs" and "Ahs" broke forth from the assembly. The summit of Aunt Sophie's glory was achieved. Her eyes shone with a lustrous brilliancy, but not an exclamation of surprise or delight escaped her. These, with her expressions of gratitude, were reserved for a later hour.

"Fer," she mentally ejaculated, "I ain't going to make a ninny of myself before these people." And so another two hours sped all too quickly, and again the great clock rang out; but this time it was ten and everyone realized that breaking-up time was at hand. Then, with much hand-shaking and many expressions of "Peace, good-will," the guests took their departure, unanimously proclaiming the success of Aunt Sophie's party.

Sometime after, when the city papers chronicled an account of a double wedding, none but the principals traced a connection of associations to the amenities of Aunt Sophie's Christmas.

It is notable that the heart of the British Empire is controlled by a spirit no longer purely German, but far more Celtic, and that a great decline in force has overtaken that once rich culture, so far as it is German.—Karl Lamprecht, in "Berliner Tageblatt."