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stop pretending to be jolly with them, but he would not listen to such a thing.

Mr. Skeens was waiting at the gate the morning before Christmas when Ned came out of the house. If there had been any other way of getting out, Ned would have turned back; but as that was the only way, he kept on and tried to pass Mr. Skeens.

"No news of the money yet, eh?" said the latter, barring the gateway by leaning upon it with his long body.

"Not any," said Ned, mournfully.

"Then, I suppose you won't have much use for your kitchen to-morrow, eh?"

"No, sir," said Ned mournfully.

"Of course not! Well, I thought I'd have a dinner party to-morrow. Think of me having a dinner party! And I thought that, seeing you had no turkey nor anything like a Christmas, you might let me have the use of your stove, eh?"

Almost anybody else would have refused, but Ned did not. He said, "Yes," Whereat Mr. Skeens grinned and went on:

"I'm going to have quite a party, and my rooms are a little small, you know. I s'pose you won't mind letting me use your back room as a dining room, eh?"

"You may have it."

"And I don't know much about cooking turkey," Mr. Skeens went on. "Do you suppose I could get your Betty, now, to cook mine for me, eh?"

There was a sudden flash in Ned's mild eye, and he hesitated a moment. Then he said very gently:

"Yes, Betty will cook it for you."

Mr. Skeens's delight at this assent was so great as to be inexpressible for more than a minute. He went through so many of his awkward grins and gestures that the three children watching at the window began to feel very uncomfortable.

"My turkey's a big one," he said; "I'll agree to match that sixteen pounder that you had to give up. I'll send the things home to-day."

Ned stared at him a moment, and then turned away.

"He's just trying to make us feel as badly as he can," he thought.

But there was no need for such an attempt, for nothing Job Skeens might do could make poor Ned feel any worse. It was simply impossible to be more unhappy than was he that Christmas Eve and night. He dreaded the coming of morning, when he should see the disappointment of the babies upon learning that Santa Claus—the Santa Claus from whom he himself had taught them to expect Christmas gifts—had passed them by.

But it made no difference how much he dreaded it, that morning would come just as morning always comes. And when it did come, it found him fast asleep. He had felt so unhappy that he had not supposed he could sleep at all, but he did.

To be sure, his sleep did not do him much good, for he had the most harrowing dreams of Roby and Essie refusing to kiss him because he had deceived them about Santa Claus; and when, in his sorrow, he groaned dismally, it seemed as if those precious babies mocked him in a series of the most awful groans he had ever heard, in the midst of which sounded Job Skeens jeering chuckle, pitched appallingly high, and prolonged into a sort of shriek.

But just then he heard Betty's cheery voice. "Oh, Popsy," she said, "do get up quick. The most wonderful thing has happened! Don't you hear Roby and Essie?"

"Why, to be sure. That's what I took for groans, I suppose."

Now you can imagine the horror of the sounds he had heard in his dream; for Roby and Essie were performing with all their might and main, the one on a drum and the other on a tin horn.

"Very likely," said Betty; "but do come quick, Popsy."

"What is it?" asked Ned, staring as if he were not yet sure that he was awake.

"Oh, I can't tell you! You must come."

It would be useless—simply useless to try to describe what Ned Joyce felt or thought when he looked into the dining room. And this you will not doubt when you know what he saw.

The room was literally piled with Christmas

presents. Piled is the only word for it. It was just as if Santa Claus had emptied his bundles right into the room. And there were Roby and Essie, exactly as they had tumbled out of bed, prancing about from one thing to another, shrieking and squealing with delight, and all the time keeping up the drumming and horn blowing as if they could not stop.

After Ned had vigorously rubbed his eyes, to make sure that he was awake, he turned to Betty and stared at her. She stared back.

"Well!" gasped he, "where did they come from?"

"I don't know. I heard the children shouting and screaming, and came in here, and there they were with all these things. They say Santa Claus brought them; but they are truly meant for us, for here are our names on the bundles."

Ned looked solemn for a moment, then a bright smile broke over his face, and he beamed on Betty like his own jolly self, and said with a grateful quaver in his voice:

"I don't know who sent them, or how they came here, Betty; but let's enjoy them and be thankful."

Whoever put the things there, or how they could be put there, was a mystery which only grew greater as they tried to solve it. But it was evident that the affair had been carefully planned, for every one received just the most fitting gifts.

If any one had been specially favoured, perhaps it was Betty; and it seemed to her that she had everything she could possibly wish for.

"Why," said Ned in amazement, as he examined all the presents, "I never saw such a Christmas in my life!"

He even decided that the turkey, now, was not worth a regret, and he declared that he must help get Mr. Skeens's dinner. Never was there such fun in the jolly Joyce household as when Ned put on a big apron—big for Betty, but small for him—and installed himself as assistant cook. It is a wonder Betty did anything right with those three children under her feet all the time.

But she did; dear me, yes, she did. Ask any of Mr. Skeens's guests of that day if ever they ate a better dinner than that little twelve year-old cook prepared for them. But about those guests of Mr. Skeens. They ought to be mentioned. Yes, indeed, they ought to be mentioned, at least. Not that they have anything to do with the story—oh, no! But they ought to be mentioned.

They began to arrive at half-past twelve. The bell rang, and the Joyces waited to let Mr. Skeens admit his guests. But the bell rang, and rang, and he did not come down; so Betty ran to the door, while Ned hurried off his apron and went into the dining room to welcome the inhospitable Mr. Skeens's guests. And how do you suppose he did it? The moment he saw them he cried out:

"Why! why! Bless my soul!"

And a prolonged and joyous "oh h-h!" was the reception he had. The next moment there was such a talking as you will never hear outside of the Joyce house.

The guests were Molly Findley and her little brother Jamie.

"How did you find me?" cried Ned.

"I didn't find you. I was invited here to dinner, and I was to give you this."

"This," was an envelope, which Ned tore open at once. Of course, a twenty-dollar bill was inside of it.

"He told me to give it to you," said Molly.

"He? Who's he?" demanded Ned.

"Why, the gentleman who invited us here. Where is he?" said Molly.

"A gentleman?—who invited you?—Who can it be?—What does he look like?" asked Ned.

"He's a tall man. He keeps a second-hand book store on—"

"Mr. Skeens!" interrupted Betty, with a shout of astonishment.

For just one moment, Ned held his head in his hands as if he were afraid of losing it. Then he tore out of the door and bounded up stairs and thumped like mad on Mr. Skeens's door.

"Stop that noise. What d'ye want?" snapped Mr. Skeens.

"I want you. Open the door!" and Ned twisted and turned the knob and pushed the door as if he would stop at nothing to get in.

"I won't open the door. "Go 'way!" snarled Mr. Skeens.

"I won't go away. I'll break the door down if you don't let me in. Indeed I will," shouted Ned. There was so little doubt that Ned was in earnest, that Mr. Skeens said:

"Don't be silly, then. Don't be silly."

"I won't be silly," cried Ned.

Mr. Skeens had evidently been afraid that Ned would come after him, and had barricaded the door; for Ned could hear him moving chairs and heavy objects away from it.

All the while Ned was dancing excitedly up and down on the landing; and all the children, with wide open eyes and mouths, were staring up at him.

When the door finally opened, Ned gave one jump and caught the long Mr. Skeens in his arms, and, somehow or other, got him down stairs and into the dining room.

"Now, now—don't be silly. Don't be silly," said Mr. Skeens, looking both happy and uncomfortable.

"I won't, oh, I won't!" said Ned, catching one of Mr. Skeens's ungainly hands and shaking it vigorously; "but I've found you out. Betty, we've found him out—eh, Betty? Roby! Essie! Here's Santa Claus. Here he is! Just think of it! Roby, Essie, here he is—here's the Santa Claus that gave you all those fine things."

Betty slipped up to the awkward looking man and took his other hand gently in her little hands and smiled gratefully up into his face.

Roby and Essie, having too little penetration to discover the meaning of all the fuss, retreated together to the other side of the room and stared silently. "A scheming old Santa Claus, isn't he, now?" cried Ned, again shaking the bony hand.

The sound rather than the sense of the words seemed to strike Roby's fancy, for he nodded his head violently, and cried out with an odd look on his face, "Yes, Popsy, that's just what he is,—a skinny old Santa Claus!" he said.

Whereupon everybody but Mr. Skeens was horror-struck. He seemed not to mind it at all, but spoke up at once:

"Of course," he said, "the chimneys are so small nowadays it has pulled me all out of shape getting down them."

Then he chuckled in his peculiar way, which somehow did not seem forbidding now; and he smiled at jolly Ned, and they both laughed—each in his own way—at Roby's innocent little joke.

After which they had dinner as quickly as ever Betty could serve it, for, come to find out, the guests were only Molly and Jamie and the Joyces. Of course, a plate was put on for Mr. Skeens, though he had not thought before of eating with them.

But, in the midst of the dinner, Ned suddenly abandoned his knife and fork, leaned back in his chair, and exclaimed:

"I've a bone to pick with you, Mr. Skeens. How did those Christmas presents get into our rooms?"

At this question Mr. Skeens chuckled in his peculiar way, and, looking across the table at Ned, he drew a key from his pocket and said:

"Here's the key to your back room, sir."

Ned laughed knowingly, and reached out to take it. But, suddenly checking himself, he withdrew his hand and said in his most hearty manner:

"No, thank you. Keep it, my good friend. Nobody's door is ever closed to Santa Claus!"

Do you know what the Joyces discovered? That Job Skeens, in spite of his queer looks and eccentric ways, was as tender hearted and good—that is almost, not quite as good—as Popsy Joyce himself.

TEN DAYS MISSION AT OTTAWA.

Sir,—As I know many are interested in the details of the late mission in this city, will you allow me to correct a misprint in your account of what took place at Christ Church? The Instruction on Prayer and the Intercessory Prayer-meeting followed Matins at 10.30. The Instruction on the life of St. John Baptist took place at 4.15 each week day. Yours truly,
W. J. MUCKLETON,
Ottawa.