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JOHN S. SCOTT, Editor and Manager.

THURSDAY DECEMBER 14th, 1916

BLAKER'S BABY

CHRISTMAS STORY

From their breakfast room the Blakers looked out on a white world; the big flakes were coming down silently, the boughs of the trees were outlined in snow, the ground was covered.

"Nice Christmas weather," said Mr. John Blaker cheerily. "Yes," said his wife. "Need any money to-day?" "You'd better let me have ten dollars. I've got everything, I guess except something for Mrs. Mayrick; she gave me that fussy shawl last year when I didn't give her a thing, so I've got to get even this Christmas. It's absurd, of course, I was in hopes last year that she would stop. I've got a lot of things to post this morning; and I must send Bertha a basket of groceries and some toys for the children."

She sighed as she said this, and looked away from her husband. "After all, Christmas isn't much unless there's a child in the house," she added.

Mr. Blaker stirred his coffee. "Well, Jane," he observed a trifle impatiently, "you know I've often suggested that we adopt one."

"I should never really feel that it belonged to us."

"You'd get to."

"If you took a child from an orphanage there's no telling what you would get; it might have criminal tendencies."

"Well, you aren't apt to find a proved descendant of the Mayflower in an orphanage—though you might bring one."

"I should be in continual suspense for fear it would turn out badly."

Mr. Blaker had no argument to meet this. He pushed back his chair and went into the hall, put on his slippers and greatcoat. But before he left the house he came back and kissed his wife. "Never mind, old lady; we'll have a regular Christmas anyway. I'll send up a tree, and I'll ask Jameson to dinner. He's got no home, poor fellow. We'll have the Durham kids over in the evening. I'll bet we'll make Christmas. Here's twenty. Better stop and give the Salvation people something for their spread."

Jane smiled, and put up her mouth for another kiss. "I'm sorry, John," she said a bit wistfully.

John went out. She heard him using the broom on the front steps. Then the door opened and he put his head in. "Jane, I forgot; I won't be home to luncheon. I've got to go to Indianapolis on business."

"But you'll be home early? You know you're going round with me after dinner to deliver some presents?"

"Sure. Be back at five. Dinner at six."

At six-thirty Mr. John Blaker was telling Anna the maid that he would have his mince pie cold.

"Got everything?" he asked his wife.

"Yes. That pile on the piano is to go to the Durhams. Then there's the basket for Bertha. We can go down there and leave Mary Peole's and Betty's and the shawl for old Mrs. Green on the way."

"I told Felix to have the car at the dock at seven."

"Good gracious, if I haven't forgotten Mrs. Mayrick!"

"We'll go down Main Street and get something. Anna, may I have another piece of pie?"

"If you eat so much we won't have time for everything."

"The longer we postpone our fun the longer it lasts," philosophized Blaker.

She stopped in the middle of a sentence when she heard the door bell had rung sharply.

"It is an offense that anyone should bring things. I hope it isn't from Mrs. Mayrick. I wanted to get mine there first."

There was quite an interval before Anna appeared at the door. "Mrs. Blaker, will you please come?"

"Who is it?" "I—I don't know," said Anna. As his wife departed, Mr. Blaker devoted himself assiduously to pie. He had all but finished it when Mrs. Blaker reappeared in great excitement.

"John!" she said; and her voice was wonderful.

"What?" "Come here."

John followed. On the settle in the hall was a market-basket; Anna was bending over it. She smiled at Mr. Blaker as he approached, but the latter looked stern.

"It's a baby," said his wife solemnly. "It was at the door."

"Heh! He looked at Anna. "I didn't see anybody," she said. "I looked."

He ran to the door; his wife followed. Standing on the top step, they looked up and down. It was very quiet. An electric lamp shone at the corner, and its blue-white rays, reflected from the snow, made the street dazzlingly light. The only living being in sight at that moment was a pedestrian on the other side of the road. His arms were full of bundles. Mr. Blaker shut the door and went back.

"It's a boy," announced Anna impressively.

Mr. Blaker permitted himself a small grin. His wife frowned; as mistress of the house she probably felt that she herself had the prior claim to this discovery. But she dispensed of Anna. "Go and warm some morning's milk," said she as she leaned over the baby. He was awake and blinked at her.

"Well!" said Mr. Blaker uneasily. "Bring it into the dining room."

"There should be a note," said he. "There always is."

But there wasn't. Neither did the baby have a gold locket on his neck nor a ring on his finger. There was nothing in the basket but a bottle which looked brand new. The baby's clothes were clean but plain.

"How old do you think it is?" asked his wife.

"He's got teeth. Had I better send for the police? Or," he added as an afterthought, "how would it do to keep him till tomorrow? I suppose it would be a job finding anyone to look after it tonight."

"Its feet are cold," said his wife as she took the child out of the basket. "Go see if Anna has that milk ready. I believe it's hungry."

Half an hour later Anna brought a query from Felix as to whether or not he should wait.

"Good gracious," said Mrs. Blaker. "I forgot all about the presents! You and Felix will have to take them."

"You could leave him with Anna."

"Anna's busy. She couldn't get him to sleep," replied the lady.

"I can't buy a present for Mrs. Mayrick."

"Let Mrs. Mayrick go. I shan't give her anything. Serve her right for giving me something every year. But you'd better get something for him."

"Mr. Mayrick?"

"The baby—if he's going to be here for Christmas."

"What'll I get?"

"You and Felix take the presents and then come back. If he's asleep I'll go with you."

An hour later Mr. Blaker returned and his wife in furs. "He's asleep upstairs," she whispered. "He ate—or drank, whichever it is—the whole bottle, and then went to sleep without a 'boo.' We'll go to Kellenberg's first. He may as well have something to wear. Those clothes are awfully coarse. We will give him those for Christmas, no matter who gets him afterward. Tell Felix to stop at Nickleon's. I want to get one of those books about babies. We have to know how to feed him."

"He oughtn't to have candy, even if it is Christmas."

"Pooh!" said Mrs. Blaker knowingly.

There had never been a Christmas at the Blakers' quite like that one. The baby, lying in a cradle at the bedside when he woke at six. It is true, he paid very little attention to it; but Mrs. Blaker had a fine time showing him a wooden dog, and

with a mechanical horse. By noon the news of the arrival had somehow percolated to the neighbors' houses. Three of Anna's friends came to see him just as soon as they had finished their breakfast dishes. And later came the three ladies at whose houses Anna's friends worked. The Durham children came to bring some things and left to spread the news, after which the two older Durhams came. Betty Mallard and George Miller turned up at nine. While the former cuddled the baby, the latter stood by and smiled tolerantly as if he were the father of three instead of just being engaged. At noon Mrs. Blaker discovered two pimples on the baby's legs, and she sent for the doctor so as to be sure the child had nothing the matter with it. The doctor looked him over, pronounced him a perfect specimen, and after examining his four teeth, placed his age at eight months.

It certainly was diverting, to see the baby sitting, good as gold, under the glittering branches of the Christmas tree.

Every year the Blakers had bravely trimmed and rejoiced in a tree, but the green symbol of Christmas had never looked as it did this year. Truly, a tree should have a baby luxuriating in its tinsel shade—that is, if it can't have half a dozen babies—to get the real feeling of Christmas out of it.

The baby had on a new dress, purchased the night before at rather an exorbitant price, just because it was hand embroidered; but he did look like a little gentleman in it, and the tiny blue bow on each shoulder was more than the women could gaze upon without appropriate little noises of joy and appreciation.

Taken all in all, there was in the Blakers' household a new excitement which spread to everyone who came within hearing distance of the market-basket baby's gurgles.

In the afternoon a reporter for the Palladium requested an interview; but, curiously enough, although he spent half an hour in the library with Mr. Blaker, nothing about the baby appeared in the paper next day. Mr. Blaker seemed very reluctant to have anything printed. As he was vice-president of the Richfield National Bank and a person of political influence his wishes prevailed. The Blakers went to bed that night tired, but not unhappy.

On Monday morning, while Mrs. Blaker was giving the baby his bath, Mr. Blaker reopened the subject of the youth's disposal. "I suppose I'd better notify the police," he submitted. "We haven't any right to keep him any longer."

Mrs. Blaker spent a long time adjusting one of the baby's undergarments. Then she kissed him. When she finally looked up there was a confused flush on her countenance.

"After all, why shouldn't we keep him?" she said.

"Always?" wondered her husband.

"Oh, I know I've objected to that sort of thing; but it isn't as if he had got him from an orphan asylum. It's almost as if—as if he just came to us."

Mr. Blaker moved his chair unobtrusively, bit the ends of his fingers, looked long at his wife and the boy.

"Jane," he said at last, "I've something to confess."

"What?"

"I know you'll blame me, but—"

"Don't talk as if you really had something to confess," said Jane sharply. "Tell me what you mean."

(Continued on next page)

"The fact is, he wasn't left here."

"Wasn't left here?"

"I mean, I know who left him. I left him. That I arranged it. I went to Indianapolis yesterday and borrowed him for a couple of days. Doctor Weyerbacher fixed it up for me. When you said Christmas wasn't Christmas without a baby I thought it would be fun to try it. So I brought him home, and Betty and George left him here last night."

He paused fearfully.

Mrs. Blaker had got quite white with breath. "We've got to give him up. Whose?"

"I don't know whose. I got him at the orphanage."

"He is an orphan?" demanded Mrs. Blaker with a choke of relief.

"Yes, he is."

"Then we'll adopt him," said she decisively. "Won't they let us?"

"Oh, they'd be glad to have us do so. But of course we don't know who his people were."

Xmas Shopping at Creaghans' We are ready in every detail for the Host of Xmas Buyers CHRISTMAS 1916 is going down in history as a tribute to the long-headedness of Canadian Men and Women. Gifts this year, as never before, will be mostly of the practical sort. This store suggests at every turn what folks need most—things they would buy for themselves. If you want your gifts to be genuinely appreciated come to this store and learn what delightfully appropriate things we have.

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CHRISTMAS GIFTS In one of the oldest Latin hymns, that beautiful first Christmas is described, when "the Wise Men of the East," as we call them, came to lay the first gifts and the first Christmas prayer before the Child Jesus. The Kings of earth stood by before the Sacred Child and prayed: "Lord grant now to Thy servants To speak Thy word and do Thy deeds In the name of the Sacred Child Jesus."

PERSONALS Mr. J. A. Rundle was in St. John this week. Mr. D. J. Buckley was a visitor in St. John this week. H. S. Tozer was among the visitors to Moncton yesterday. C. M. Mercereau of Bathurst, was among the visitors in town today. Miss Henry of Ottawa, is the guest of her friend, Miss Marguerite Lawlor.

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