

## Calisty's Christmas Tree

(Minnie Leona Upton, in 'American Messenger.')

'There! now I sh'd think Miss Calisty might sit down, hull heft!'

It was the unanimous opinion of all Tunket, crystallized by Sophrony Crockett.

Forty-two years before, an energetic infant came to the home of Elon Tubbs, the most shiftless—nay, the only shiftless farmer in Tunket. She was named Calista, the name selected and laid by in readiness by her forehanded mother, along with the bibs and frocks. Elhanan was the alternative, had the case required it.

Calista Tubbs grew to be an eager faced little girl who took her small joys with shining eyes and closed lips; her small griefs likewise. But oh, the difference between those two shinings and silences!

But only her tongue was quiet. Light on her feet as a thistle down, alert as the little chipmunks which she so dearly loved, it seemed as though she only perched upon a chair ready to take flight on the moment's notice. There were so many things to do in the world, and it was so pleasant to be doing! Calisty sometimes wished that her well beloved 'pa' felt that way about it. But no one ever heard her express any such desire. When the idea became too insistent she took refuge in the reflection which her mother so often voiced, 'The Lord didn't make us all alike,' and thereby accounted for, and excused many things which otherwise would have been trying.

When it seemed as though strawberries must be about the only fruit she was tall enough to reach, she would take her little basket betimes, tuck a luncheon into her pocket, and spend whole days in the fields, jubilantly bearing her treasures home at tea time, to be taken next morning to the village store to help buy the scant 'patterns' of print and gingham which made her own and her mother's dresses. In winter she enthusiastically pulled bastings and sewed on buttons to help on the tailoring with which Esther Tubbs, an expert and tireless needle woman, filled the short winter days and long winter evenings. Later, as her mother's health failed, she took the whole burden upon her own slight but erect shoulders.

The years went on and at length she was left alone, and with desperately lonely heart, but always cheery voice and smile, she set herself to raise the mortgage on the farm so dear to her, the only home she had ever known, though more than one had been offered her, and refused for the loyal love she bore her own.

Tailoring, berrying, summer boarders, and work on the farm, assisted only by a neighbor's boy and a few weeks' help in haying and planting times—and still the goal was far away and Calisty's step had lost some of its spring, though her voice and manner were buoyant as ever, when suddenly the unexpected happened. A small legacy from an erratic and long-unheard from uncle in the West put the farm safely into the tired and toilworn, but un-resting hands, and left a reassuring margin.

It was at this time that it was reasonably conjectured that 'Calisty might sit down hull heft.'

At first it seemed that she might satisfy the prophets and prophetesses. She

had Uncle Si Hill come and paint the house outside and in, had the rooms re-papered, re-carpeted, whitewashed, kalsomined, curtained and draped, as only Miss Calisty could have done without caustic comment.

Then, when all was swept and garnished, she put the capstone on our towering amazement by boarding the bi-weekly stage attired and equipped for travelling. Mehitabel Fogg asserted that Almiry Tucker had told her that Miss Calisty had said that she was going for a trip to visit some friends in the city, but not one of us had ever heard of her knowing anybody there, and we keenly resented the semblance of superior information in one who was not really 'of' us, having lived all her life in the village. Therefore we forebore to question or comment, and awaited developments.

They came—two of them. They were thin and big-eyed and distressingly speckless and 'slicked-up.' They were twins and eleven, and Calisty got them at a 'Home,' and she was radiant.

Then we knew—what we ought to have known before—that Miss Calisty did not want 'to sit down hull heft,' that nothing would induce her to do it.

We soon grew to know Amos and Janet and to like them right well. And after Miss Calisty had shown them where the best berries grew and they had spent scores of long, sweet sunny hours gathering them, their chests filled out, and their cheeks grew rosy and rounded, and we decided that they were excellent well-looking children. We agreed that Calisty might have done worse, and we nodded approvingly and prophesied fair things.

Neither of them could remember father or mother—nobody but an old woman who had taken all the money they earned selling papers and had fed them sparingly and intermittently, and clothed them thinly, and finally died in a fit of wrath that was brought on by an offending fellow lodger.

But Janie had a well-watered regret. It was Panky—Panky, who lived with people beside whom her own task mistress was embodied amiability. Panky, who could sell more papers than any other girl in the city, who knew the most songs and could play the harmonica, and who had 'licked' a boy much larger than herself, who was tormenting a stray cat; Panky, the inimitable, who used rough words and got 'mad' right often, but who never told a lie or did a mean thing. And Panky was selling papers on the city streets.

'Who hath given to me this sweet

And given my brother dust to eat.

And when will his wage come in?'

Janie might have soliloquized had she been conversant with the poets, which she was not. But she felt it, and to the prayers which she said at bed time she added a fervent appendix: 'And please, dear Father, manage it somehow so Panky can come!'

There was so much room and so much to eat at the farm and Panky was so small and needed so little to eat—oh, if 'Aunt Calisty' would only think to ask her too! But Janie couldn't ask her to do that. She only told things about Panky and spoke of her oftener than semi-occasionally (because she couldn't help it) and prayed vigorously.

Barring this shadow, life at the farm was delightful, and the twins flourished

like green bay trees, till all of a sudden everything went wrong. It came about at the time of fall cleaning in which they were assisting, Amos beating rugs until his determined little face was scarlet, and Janie mopping and dusting and arranging and rearranging until their nutting was sadly neglected.

'Chippy'll get ahead of us,' said Amos, somewhat regretfully, as he rested a moment to watch the bright-eyed chipmunk who was laying in his winter's supplies in the hollow trunk of the old sweetening tree that stretched its richly laden arms out, almost into the windows of the 'kitchen and spare room.'

'Never mind, we'll catch up, we're bigger,' responded Janet, dangling a long paring from the Gravensteins which she was preparing for pies, and then adroitly flinging it over her shoulder. It fell on the smooth stone step forming a perfect 'P' with part of an 'a' attached. 'If "only" Panky could come!' she sighed.

'Panky "is" a brick,' quoth Amos, 'if we was only bigger! P'raps we kin fix it up somehow, some day so that she kin come. I'm gittin' stronger ev'ry day an' pr'aps next spring Aunt Calisty'll let me work out some for Mr. Bonney after our farm work's done, an' I could earn enough to give Panky a vacation any way.'

'P'raps! Amos, you're a brick! Anyway we'll keep on a-thinkin' hard! An' a pray-in' too.'

Miss Calisty hurrying into the sitting room to attend to her stewing quinces, heard with a sigh, 'Three wouldn't be so bad, now—but by-an'-by—the education an' all—I d'no'. No, I can't, that's all.'

When she returned from the kitchen, the twins' 'stint' was finished and they had scurried off to the beeches.

Upstairs the contents of her best bureau drawers were spread upon the spare bed, then one by one they were replaced, and Miss Calisty was closing the last drawer when a sense of something missing made her open it again and thoroughly inspect the contents. The others followed in order. No, it was not there—the exquisitely beautiful embroidered scarf brought her years ago by her dearest girlhood's friend who had gone as a missionary to China—her one altogether lovely possession. And her prolonged search in house and yard availed nothing. Then she buried her flushed face in her trembling hands and cried heart-breakingly. But it was not the loss of the scarf—no, far worse! It was the suspicion—transformed into conviction in her quick decided mind—that her boy and girl, the beings she loved and lived for, were thieves. She could not bear it.

It was a tearless, though saddened face that the twins saw when they returned, feeling a little guilty at having flitted off so unceremoniously. Now that their nutting fever had cooled a little they really felt it quite a grave offence and their subdued little faces only served to deepen that awful conviction.

'It was for that Panky,' she said to herself resentfully. 'She's too smart to be trusted. I haven't seen all the letters she's sent them, an' I b'lieve she's been puttin' 'em up to it. She could sell it for a lot of money. But I won't accuse them or even ask them. If kindness won't make them ashamed an' sorry, then nothin' will, and an ownin' up that isn't a free-will offer-