

BLUEHOOD

A Christmas Story

Written for the CANADIAN HOME JOURNAL by

S. JEAN WALKER.



HE merry jingle of sleigh-bells, the gay snatch of song, the joyous shouts and happy laughter of youthful voices were borne on the clear frosty air to the pleasant parlor of the old manse in Kentville, where Rev. William McLaren, his wife, and brother were talking around a cosy fire.

Henry McLaren, B.A., mathematical teacher in Durham college, was spending a few days of his vacation with his brother, who was pastor of a large congregation in this pretty, picturesque town in Central Ontario.

As the merry shouts and happy ringing laughter echoed again and again through the air, Henry McLaren jumped up and said, laughingly, "I'm going to join those youngsters on the hillside. Their noisy shouting makes me feel like a boy again, and reminds me of the time when we used to go coasting down that hill behind the school-house at home."

Turning to his sister-in-law, in whom he knew he would find a staunch ally in his fun, he said "Give me an old coat, cap—anything for a disguise—and I'm off."

"Now, do not shake your head and look so wise and solemn, Will. You would come yourself if you were not afraid of lowering your ministerial dignity."

"No one will recognize me in this toggery, and very few know me, anyway." Rapidly donning an old coat, cap and muffler his sister-in-law mischievously brought him, he looked like an awkward overgrown school-boy, and his appearance provoked even his calm, dignified brother to laughter.

"You're a real boy yet, Hal, with all your wisdom and learning. Your added years bring very little change to your heart whatever they may do to your head."

"Yes, I'm no dignified professor now. That's only a dream. I'm mischief-loving Hal McLaren, a happy boy again."

With a merry laugh he was gone.

The minister with a smile turned to his wife and said, "I wonder if Hal will ever feel the weight of years? He is the same merry, generous happy-hearted fellow as of old. No danger that he will ever become fossilized. Yet what a calm, collected, dignified man he is in college."

But how did Professor McLaren succeed? He reached the hill guided by the merry shouting, but on arriving there realized he lacked a very necessary thing—a sleigh.

"Say, boy," to a chubby-faced lad near him, "I'll give you a dollar if you lend me that sleigh for a couple of hours."

"Let's see your dollar first," said the cautious, young Canadian.

The professor, quite amused at the boy's shrewdness, handed him a dollar, saying, "Is it a bargain?" "Guess so. Mighty easy way to make a dollar. Here's the sleigh. I'll wait around until you're through with it."

"Guess he's some country greeny," soliloquized the boy. "Say, can't I just get lots of things with this dollar?" Chuckling with

delight over his good fortune, he began scheming how he could steal a ride from some of the other boys.

"Up the hill went the teacher in happy possession of the sleigh; and very soon he was guiding it dexterously among the many coasters. In a moment he had passed them all, and shot out beyond the farthest mark yet made.

"I guess Greeny knows what he's about," muttered the owner of the sleigh, who still hovered near.

On coming up the third time, the teacher noticed a young girl looking wistfully at the merry crowd, yet not joining in the merriment around her. Apparently she was a stranger, and the riotous coasters were too intent on their fun to be courteous. She appeared to be an overgrown school girl, probably about fifteen years old. Her short dress, grey coat and blue hood were quite old-fashioned looking.

Mr. McLaren rather basily approached her—feeling amused at his awkward timidity—and asked, "Will you ride down with me?" "With pleasure," she answered cheerily. Soon they were laughing and talking quite at ease, and entering into the sport with frolicsome zest.

In the moonlight he could see that she was pretty. Her voice was low and sweet, and her language well-chosen, indicating culture and refinement. Her general appearance puzzled him, for her old, out-of-date garments were truly an anomaly.

"I guess Greeny's got a girl," said the boy, who still watchfully kept his eye on the sleigh. "She looks as countrified as he does. Say, isn't he a jolly coaster. There must be plenty of hills and snow where he came from."

Merrily the time flew until the town clock struck ten. As the girl counted the last stroke she said hurriedly: "I must be at home before the half-past ten train arrives. Do not consider me rude, but I would rather go alone," she replied to his low-spoken request.

"Thank you for the pleasure you have given me to-night, Mr.—Mr.—" She looked at him inquiringly, but he would not interpret the look. She waited a moment, then archly said, "Good-night, Mr. Stranger."

"Good-night, Bluehood. We'll meet again, I hope—undisguised," he said merrily, touching his old cap.

He spent Christmas with his brother, but said nothing about his adventure. On the following day he left for the city to arrange some business in connection with his college work.

As the train bore him swiftly away that cold, winter morning his most pleasant thoughts were of his rides with Bluehood; yet he wondered regretfully if he should ever see her again.

College re-opened with an unusual number of students, and consequently a greater amount of work to do.

To assist in training men for the responsibilities of life was a solemn duty to Henry McLaren. His keen intellect, noble manhood, tender, loving sympathy and discerning tact made him the loved, admired and trusted friend of the students.

"He often thought how amused his class would be if they knew of his escapade that Christmas Eve. A smile would illumine his face and glow in his fine, dark eyes as he

thought of it. He generally closed his reflections by saying, "I wonder if I shall ever see her again?"

Once more Commencement Day arrived, and many friends and acquaintances of the teachers and students were assembled again within the old college halls.

Mr. McLaren was welcoming some old friends, and did not observe the principal of the college at his side until he spoke his name, and then introduced him to his sister, Mrs. Morrison, and her daughter, saying in his brusque way, that he would leave both ladies in Mr. McLaren's care, as his presence was required elsewhere. Thus a very agreeable task was assigned him.

He conducted the ladies to seats, and placed himself beside Miss Morrison. The conversation was general and quite entertaining, but yet his mind was strangely stirred.

Where had he seen that face before? The profile was certainly very familiar, and that pure, flute-like voice sounded like a strain of sweet, entrancing music.

While puzzling his brain to find where this fancied resemblance belonged, like a flash of light he remembered Bluehood. Yes, they certainly resembled each other. Perhaps Bluehood was a younger sister. He would cautiously enquire.

After conversing a short time about their surroundings, she looked up at him and said, in a puzzled way, "Have we ever met before, Mr. McLaren? Your voice sounds strangely familiar." He bent low and whispered audaciously, "I think we have, Bluehood." He was almost sorry that he spoke so abruptly, when he saw her fair face flush and her blue eyes fall in confusion. In a moment she regained her composure and said merrily, "So you are Mr. Stranger;" and to relieve from embarrassment both laughed over the remembrance of their former meeting.

Then, in a low voice, she very earnestly asked, "May I ask you to keep my escapade a secret? Mother would be quite shocked and grieved did she know of it. She is talking to a friend beside her, so I shall tell you how I came to do such a daring, thoughtless thing. I was spending my Christmas vacation with my sister, Mrs. James Lester. Her husband and she had gone to the city that morning to purchase Christmas presents, so I was left alone with the children and servants. After the little folks had gone to bed that evening, I felt dull and lonely. The merry shouts and happy laughter of the young people sleigh-riding lulled me from my book. Donning one of my sister's old school suits that I had seen in the attic that day, while playing with the children, I went up to the hill and joined the merry throng. Being a stranger in the town I did not fear recognition, and my strange garb disguised me, anyway. I had a very pleasant time sleigh-riding with a rather—well countrified looking young man. Now you confess," she said archly.

Falling in with her gay mood he answered, "I was visiting my brother, Rev. William McLaren. Hearing the merriment on the hillside I felt like a boy again, so hastily donning some old clothes my sister-in-law mischievously brought to me, I hurried to the hill. Procuring a sleigh from a chubby-faced urchin, I saw a young girl standing near, who seemed to be a stranger, so bashfully approaching her I found she was quite willing to trust herself to my guidance, and