

The Sentimental Financier

A Christmas Story

John Chester, lawyer and financier, turned the key and re-entered his office. He had been fully halfway home when he had remembered an important document on which he had intended to work that evening by his own fire side, with the soothing aid of his mercurium and his shaded library lamp.

He strongly objected to working at the office after hours; its deadly silence annoyed him. Not that Miss Marlow was noisy when on duty, but the cheerful click of her typewriter and the business-like way she worked about the office were rather pleasing to her employer.

Mr. Chester switched on the light and crossed to his desk, which bore unmistakable signs of having been straightened up during his absence. That was another thing about Miss Marlow—she never mislaid things. Of course, having worked with him for ten years, she knew the business almost as well as he did himself.

But tonight, as he approached the desk, he stopped short with a gasp of surprise. A most unprecedented thing had happened. A large box wrapped in white paper, tied with Christmas ribbons and sealed with holly seals, lay upon his blotting-pad. It bore the words, in Miss Marlow's handwriting, "A Very Merry Christmas—from Jean."

The lawyer frowned as he poked it gingerly with one finger, then lifted it, balancing it on his hand to feel the weight. What could this mean? It was an exceedingly strange thing for Miss Marlow to do, and most unlike her. Christmas had always passed practically unnoticed at the office, as he considered it a nuisance, and felt his duty nobly done when he had given Miss Marlow a nice little cheque, which, he surmised, was badly needed at home.

He glanced at the calendar. It was only Dec. 20th. She was early enough and no mistake. He sat down before the desk and turned the box over and over undecipherably. He hardly knew what to do. But curiosity, not being confined entirely to the gentler sex at length prevailed. He untied the dainty bow and broke the holly seals of the first Christmas gift he had received for many a year.

Inside, he box were crinkly folds of his sue paper and more seals. "Flummery and nonsense," snorted the lawyer, delving eagerly into the depths and drawing forth a card, which read:

"Santa Claus's deer strained a hoof on the ridge of a snowy roof. So he left this parcel to give to you. With love and good wishes for next year, too."

For he had to scurry and scamper away, lest he disappoint anyone Christmas Day. The girl is crazy, absolutely!" exclaimed Mrs. Chester, putting down the card and removing the tissue paper. There before him lay a doll, artistically gowned, as even an uninitiated bachelor of forty-five could see—so artistically that he lifted her from the box to examine her more carefully.

A wonderful gown it was, of some soft, shimmering blue material, or was it pink? And a white hat, trimmed with rosebuds on her silver brown hair. As he lifted her, her eyelids opened and she stared at him—a fixed, unhuman stare.

At that moment a resounding knock echoed through the room, and the janitor entered hastily. Mr. Chester jammed the doll into the box and arose, coughing frantically to cover his embarrassment. His face was a slightly high in color, for the janitor looked unusually pleasant.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Chester," he began, "but Miss Marlow has just phoned me, that she left a box with a doll for a little sick child somewhere, and she wants to know if it is on her desk, as she was shopping at several places on the way home. If it's here it will be all right, and she'll get it tomorrow."

"Yes, it's here," returned Mr. Chester looking as forbidding as possible and trying to obscure from view as large a portion of the desk as he could by interposing his substantial bulk. "Tell her it was on my desk. I'll put it in her drawer."

Long after Jenkins had shuffled off down the hall John Chester sat staring unseeing at the sleeping beauty in her tissue paper nest. He had something of the hurt feeling of a child who expects a present and has it rudely snatched away when his hand is outstretched to receive it.

It was many years since he had observed a doll at close range, and it had brought back a flood of memories of bygone Christmas parties, when noisy brothers and sisters and cousins had romped in the lonely house where old Martha, his long suffering housekeeper, awaited him at that moment, with a wistful eye upon the clock.

The family had been scattered since then; all were married but himself, and although some of them lived within easy distance, he had never troubled to answer their letters or keep up social relationships. He was too much immersed in business. "A hard-headed financier," people called him; and some added "hard-hearted" as well. His business ability was unquestioned, but he had never been known to do a mean or unjust thing.

"That doll must have cost the girl a lot of money," he mused, "not to mention the work she has put on it. She had probably done without necessities for herself to get it for that sick child." Jenkins had informed him only a week ago that she supported her widowed mother and two younger sisters, and he had noticed that her gloves were mended and she had no muff.

"I'm a selfish brute," he muttered. "I've made over ten thousand this year, and I give her a hundred and fifty. I'll make her as hard as I do, and takes just as much interest. I must get acquainted with the family and find out how they are situated. Her mother was a friend of my sister Ethel. I wonder—yes, I'll do it."

It was eight o'clock before John Chester moved from his chair and turned toward home and his belated dinner. That even-

ing, by the library lamp, he worked steadily and late; but not at legal documents. There was a letter to each of his sisters and brother, inviting them and their families to a reunion at the New Year. Martha, who had been in the family in the old days, had hailed the prospect with joy, and was at that moment laying plans with Polly, her underling, for a perfect orgy of baking.

Mr. Chester sat for a long time staring into his hearth fire and musing on the years that the locust had eaten. His slumbering conscience was aroused at last, and, like everything else about him, it was a businesslike conscience. It told him all the people he might have helped on those wretched Christmases, the homes that would have been brightened immeasurably by a very small expenditure. By the time it had finished with him he felt small and mean and rather ill.

"That wretched doll," he groaned; "it is to blame for all this; and yet, in a way, I feel better already. I feel like a mummy come to life. And now to business; my debit side horribly over-balances my credit."

It was midnight before he had finished and leaned back to read over the substantial list he had thought out with great deliberation. No one was forgotten—the janitor, the scrub-woman, the office boy. "I'll get Miss Marlow to give me some names of people who need help. I'm not going to do things by halves," he concluded. Then, with a strangely light-hearted, almost boyish, feeling he slipped the list into his pocket and retired for the night.

Next morning, when Miss Marlow entered the office rather earlier than usual, she was horrified to see her neat Christmas parcel lying on the desk opened and disarranged, and Mr. Chester in the act of thrusting the doll back into the box with nervous haste.

"Oh, Miss Marlow," he explained looking like a schoolboy in disgrace, "I owe you an apology. This doll has occasioned a resurrection." And he proceeded with a full and vivid recital of his mistake and its consequences, and his desire to make this Christmas a record one for as many people as he possibly could.

Miss Marlow's brown eyes grew wide and bright as he outlined his plans. Would she help him? Decidedly she would. Her thin face flushed with delight. She looked actually pretty. Mr. Chester thought, as he entered enthusiastically into the spirit of the thing. There were so many she knew who could have a wonderful Christmas on so very little.

That evening the unexpected happened at the Marlow's tiny apartment. They were favored with a call from John Chester. Mrs. Marlow, who had not seen him since schoolgirl days when she had visited his sister, could hardly reconcile the burrowing-looking man of the world who leaned back in such blissful content in her comfortable armchair.

Mr. Chester announced that his visit was partly business and wholly pleasure. His first ostentatious glance had taken in the small, close rooms and the evidences of a hard struggle against circumstances. He casually informed Mrs. Marlow that he was looking for a tenant for one of his houses which had just been completed. It was warm and comfortable, and had a small garden, and he was anxious to secure good tenants. He named a monthly rental ten dollars less than it was his custom to charge.

The unsuspecting Mrs. Marlow and Jean and the twelve-year-old twins exchanged joyful glances. It was for this very thing that they had been hopelessly longing—a little home, with a garden and a verandah and a real upstairs. They fell upon the offer with avidity.

They were visiting it. One was from the country, and had been taken there by his friend who wished him to be duly impressed by its grandeur. As they came out, the resident of the city said:

"Well, Mike, and what do you think of it? Isn't it grand?"

"Pat, said the one from the country. "It beats the divil!"

"That," said his friend, "was the intention."

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WE talked to Santa Claus the other day, asking him what time he planned to come to our town, because all the children were much interested to learn. Some of the little ones, we told him, feared he might not come at all—that they might be forgotten. But Santa smiled.

"I will bewitch you, have no fear," he said, "but just the hour I cannot say. If I get lots of help, it may be early, very early, but who knows? When the mince pie is in the oven and the pudding is in the pot, when the big gobbler is crisp and brown and nuts and raisins rest on mother's snowy tablecloth, when sleepy eyes are opened to behold the tree and the laughter of all the children echoes over fields and down the streets, when tender hearts, just everywhere, are aglow with the joy of human brotherhood, there will not be a child in all the land that will not know old Santa's been around. A little lump will rise in mother's throat and perhaps a tear in dear old dad's eye will tell us that the spirit of the Christ still lives."

This year Santa said he will have a gift for everyone, the greatest gift in all the world. Of course he will leave the toys, the apples and the candy sticks, but the candy will be eaten and one day the tin soldier will be bent. The big gift is to last forever. Santa found it in a manger. We forgot to ask its name, but as we look across the years and view the setting sun, we think that Jesus called it LOVE, so let us watch for it on Christmas morn and nourish it throughout the years, each day, each moment of our lives.

The Uninvited Guest

BY VIRGINIA STANDARD

(A Christmas Story For The Kiddies.)

When the long, lighted train pulled into Fairwood on Christmas Eve, Roderick Dale was there to meet the little guests who were coming to spend the holidays with him.

Mr. Dale swung the children to the platform. "Five six—seven—eight," he counted. Then he hurried them out to a big sleigh and tucked all of them in under furs. The driver spoke to the horses, and away they went shaking music from their silver bells across the snow.

When the sleigh reached the house ten minutes later the children swarmed up the broad steps.

Mrs. Dale met them at the top. "All eight of you here?" she asked.

"All but Rick Payson!" they cried. "He couldn't come!"

Roderick's father stopped short. "But I counted eight, he declared.

The children did not know how that could be; they had thought he was counting Roderick in, they said.

"I'll count them again!" cried Roderick. So in the light that streamed from the hall he counted his guests carefully. Three Prestons, two Torreys, a Morton and a Ray—that made seven. Then he stopped short in front of a dark, silent little figure that stood apart from the rest.

"Who is this boy?" he asked.

Sure enough, who was he? They hurried into the lighted hall, and all eyes were turned on the stranger. He was very small and was bundled up in a big overcoat. Between his coat collar and his funny peaked cap a pair of large black eyes stared solemnly out.

"What is your name?" asked Mrs. Dale. The little boy replied briefly that it was Timothy.

"Timothy what?"

"Baxter. And I was going alone to visit my grandfather at Baywood. Where is my grandfather?"

Mrs. Dale turned to her husband. "O William, how did you get hold of that child? His people must be so anxious!" Mr. Dale looked worried. "The boy must have thought the conductor called 'Baywood' he said. And I scooped him up with the rest and didn't notice."

He hurried away to telephone to the other station while the children took off their wraps and began to laugh and talk again, still casting curious glances at the odd little stranger.

"I've talked to his grandfather," Roderick's father said coming back. "It's all right. There's no other train tonight, and so Timothy will stay here with us."

Timothy ate his supper slowly and afterwards withdrew to a corner, where he watched the other children's games with wondering eyes.

"We shouldn't dare play with him he looks so solemn."

When it was nearly bedtime Roderick wandered into the sitting room. There was a frown on his face.

"I wish that stupid little old Timothy didn't have to be here!" he complained. "He's so funny and big-eyed—like an owl. And mother says he's to sleep in my room. Nobody asked him here, and there's no place for him to stay."

Roderick's grandfather laid down his book. "This little Timothy's having the same trouble another child had," he said. "Only in a whole town He couldn't find anywhere to stay."

"What child?" Roderick inquired interested. "And what town? It must have been a pretty poor sort of place, I should think. Where did the boy sleep, grandfather?"

The old man picked up his book again. In a stammer he told the story, he said. "The name of the town was Bethlehem."

Roderick's cheeks grew scarlet. He walked over to the window and pressed his hot face to the frosty glass. A big gold star was shining just above the sky line. After a while he turned away without a word.

A few minutes later the household was startled to hear peals of laughter from the playroom. Timothy, wandering around alone, had found Roderick's hobbyhorse behind the door. It was plain that he had never seen such a thing in all his life. He stood in front of it and shouted with delight. Then some one put him on the horse's back and he gathered up the reins still shouting and began to ride. He rode hard and fast until it was time to go to bed.

Early the next morning the children came creeping downstairs to get their stockings. They gathered in a joyful circle round the bright fire in the living room.

Suddenly the door opened softly. Timothy Baxter stood on the threshold. He was dressed in a suit of Roderick's night clothes, and his hair stood up all over his head; he gazed with pleasure at the half-emptied stockings.

"Which is my stocking, please?" he asked in a clear, high little voice. "No, one answered, so he spoke again. "If you please," he repeated quietly but firmly.

The children looked uncomfortable. This was too bad. They realized what had happened: in the bustle and confusion the unexpected guest had been overlooked. They eyed one another in dismay.

"Perhaps mine fell on the floor," Timothy suggested gently.

At that Roderick scrambled to his feet. "See here, Timothy," he said. "You run back to bed for just five minutes, and then come down and get your stocking."

As the door closed, he turned quickly to the others. "We'll have to make up a stocking for him," he said. "And there's no time to lose."

When Timothy appeared five minutes later, he had his share with the rest.

Right after breakfast a big, shabby sleigh drove up in the yard—Timothy's grandparents had come to get him.

The family went to look for Timothy and found him riding the hobbyhorse. He was decked out in all his Christmas presents—a red toboggan cap, a drum, a horn slung over his shoulders. When he heard that his grandfather was ready for him he dismounted briskly and pulled a pair of colored reins—another Christmas gift—from his pocket. He fastened the reins on the horse's shaggy neck. "Come along, Racer!" he cried.

Floor Timothy, he had made a terrible mistake! He had understood that the hobby horse too was his to take home and he believed that if he only pulled forward it would move forward as well as up and down. He had even given it a name. When he found out the truth, he bowed his head in Racer's name. He did not cry; he only stood in dumb despair. A bigger boy would not have made such a mistake, but Timothy was only five years old.

"Mother," said Roderick, "let him have the horse. He must have it. Don't you see?"

"Do you mean that, Roddy?" asked Mrs. Dale. Roderick nodded. "I don't want it so very much," he said.

So they lifted the horse into the back of the big sleigh, while old Mr. and Mrs. Baxter looked on, smiling, and the Dales and all the little guests stood by to watch. Timothy would not stir until the horse was firmly tied in with its head toward the rear horse's head. Then, when Mr. Dale started to lift him into place between the old people, he squirmed out of his hands and scrambled over the side.

"I will ride Racer," he said in positive tones.

No one could stop him. He climbed to the hobbyhorse's back and sat there, clutching the reins.

As the sleigh drove slowly out of the gate, the hobbyhorse bowed up and down. Timothy sat erect, drum, horn and all. It was a strange sight; all the way down the road people turned round and looked. Roderick stood on the porch laughing.

The last thing he saw, as the team turned a bend, was a spot of bright red bobbing gayly in the Christmas sunshine.

A Canadian Christmas Song

There's a joy that grips the heart-strings when the year is at the spring. When the first blue violet blossoms and we hear the robins sing.

Glad are the summer's sunlit days that lure us off to camp. To plunge in cool brown waters, and in woodland ways to tramp.

Songs of thanksgiving fill our lips when autumn's lavish hand A golden harvest broadcast pours o'er our beloved land.

Then the kiss of old king winter brings roses to the cheek. And skates are gaily ringing on every rink and creek.

Each season has its rapture, its beauty and good cheer. It's good to live in Canada at any time of year!

But best of all, when Christmastime yields its benignant sway. When envy, malice, selfishness, in shame have fled away.

When smile meets smile, as we reflect the spirit of the King. Who lay a Babe in Bethlehem, with angels carolling.

As memory's golden key unlocks our tenderest, kindest mood, We greet the world the angels sang of peace and brotherhood.

—By Mercy E. McCulloch.



Doing Its Duty

The Cathedral had been gayly decorated for the Christmas services and two Irishmen were visiting it. One was from the country, and had been taken there by his friend who wished him to be duly impressed by its grandeur. As they came out, the resident of the city said:

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