

A CHRISTMAS STORY. 75

He arose wearily and, walking to the fireplace, sank into an easy chair beside it.

So it was Christmas Eve, after all. He had almost forgotten the fact, until forcibly reminded of it by his mother's letter. Well, she would spend it alone, in the old home, and perhaps think of him and love him still. Thus his fancy ran on, while the bright flames danced in shadows around the room and gradually soothed him to sleep.

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The door opened and the butler entered carrying a telegram. He opened it carelessly and then grew white to the very lips. His mother—dying—wanted to see him again. He rushed into the hall, seized his hat, and a moment later was in a cab, driving swiftly to the railway station.

Yes, he was in time for the out-going train. Thank God for that. But would it not arrive too late?

The journey seemed endless. The fear of finding his mother already dead and his newly awakened remorse made it well-nigh unbearable.

For the first time he saw his conduct in its true light. All his ingratitude and neglect loomed up before him, and, in striking