

At the House of Dreams.

Agnes Lockhart Hughes.

HE sat in a shabby armchair, gazing through the frosty panes, out to where the snow lay in glittering heaps on the wind-swept street; and he cursed aloud the rattling window sashes, and the creaking doors. It was Christmas Eve, and the moon sent silver shafts over the winter's first gift of snow, 'till it seemed studded with myriads of uncut gems. The blustering north wind, rushing by, clutched at the leafless trees, bending and twisting their creaking limbs, like frail pipe-stems, in a giant's grasp. The Frost King stalked abroad, and pale stars gleamed coldly down on the snow-clad earth.

"A beastly night, chilling one to the marrow," muttered Tom Andrews, as a falling icicle struck a sharp rap at his window pane. Then suddenly, merry voices laughing and singing, reached his ear. A gay party were carrying sprays of holly, and garlands of evergreens to a nearby church. As they stumbled through the snowdrifts, their laughter grew louder, and Tom withdrew from his seat at the window.

"Silly idiots—every one of them. Laughing indeed, after the hardships of the panic, from which we have not yet recovered. With such a wretched outlook, too, for the coming year. Trade at a standstill—stocks low—and money tight;—laugh you idiots laugh. Ah, I hate the world with its senseless merry making, when we have such cause to weep. I'd like to know who invented the silly custom of all this row at Christmas, with its absurd custom of giving; giving indeed." Then Tom shook, as though with ague. "There, I might have known I am getting a cold, that's about all this season brings me—laugh is it? laugh?"—and a sneeze interrupted his further utterance. The merry voices gradually grew fainter, and Tom fell in-

to a doze beside the hearth on which a few red embers, were quickly turning to silvery ashes.

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The wind with a shriek, threw open the door, and as Tom was about to utter an imprecation, across the threshold tropped men and maidens followed by older dandies and damsels, in costume of bygone days before the reign of the despot, Goid. The satin knee-breeches, plumed hat, embroidered doublet, peruke, fob, pompadour and buckled shoes—all were there as though a merry carnival were at its height. Out from the motley crowd stepped an old man in powdered wig, and leaning on a gold-headed cane. "Look at me Tom, have you forgotten your old Dad? See your ancestors, from a century back, have come to visit you. A jolly Christmas, lad, cheer up, all the world rejoices,—you too should be glad."

Tom was too dumbfounded for utterance. One of the guests stuck his lighted torch in a sconce; another piled high the logs in the grate, and set them blazing; while the general chatter and laughter filled the air with merriment. Tom could not utter a word, but stood trembling. Several of the merry-makers gathered around the table, and in a few minutes transformed the bare surface to a board with tempting viands and edibles. In the centre glittered a great bowl, in which the fragrant punch was steaming.

Clicking his high heels on the bare floor, Tom's great grandfather approached him and said: "Good luck—and good cheer—for even in the days of old when life was full of despair, with sleepless nights and anxious days, the star of hope never wavered but made gay our Christmaside."

Tom's grandfather, puffing a long clay