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Aunt Sophie's Christmas

By Amy Emil Seely

WHEN Ruth Wilmar visited Aunt Sophie at mid-summer, she imparted to that old lady so glowing a description of their last Christmas festivities that the good soul was infused with a spirit of emulation. "If only I could fix up things like the city folks what a day 'twould be hereabouts." So mused the old lady, and with the speculation came an inspiration. Thereafter every nickel that came into Aunt Sophie's possession was deposited in a little silk bag designed for its reception, and so, one week before Christmas, she found herself the proud possessor of thirteen dollars and thirty-five cents.

Invitations were already out for Aunt Sophie's Christmas party.

"I ain't going to make no explanations," she told her prospective guests. Nevertheless, she managed to dispense so many vague and mysterious hints as to leave those good country people on the tip-toe of expectancy.

Next day's mail brought a note from Rob and Tommy, Aunt Sophie's two sons, announcing that as the trail was snowed up, those young men would be unable to get their teams home for Christmas. Rob and Tommy worked in a logging camp "back in the hills." This

As a matter of fact, Aunt Sophie really required her maid every minute of that day, but—well, doubtless, Sally's mother needed her still more.

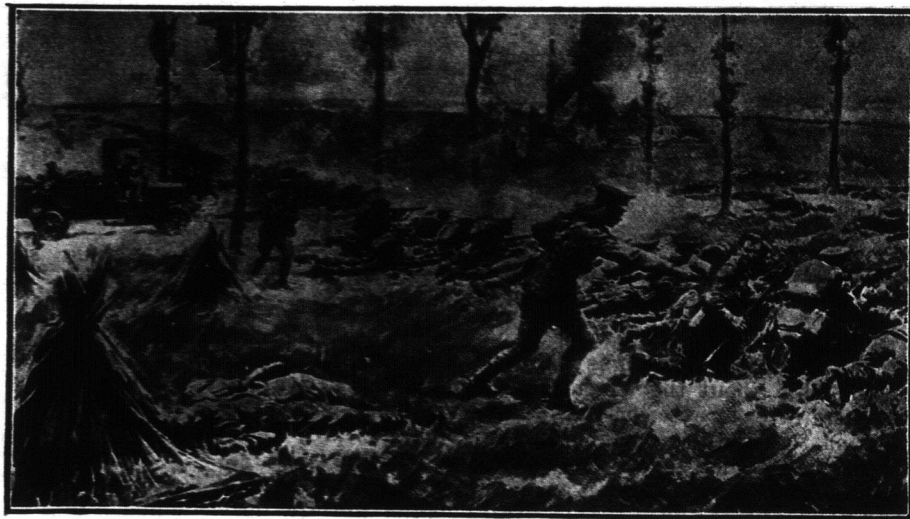
Half an hour later, Sally's mistress having betaken herself to the kitchen, turned her attention to the preparation of the Christmas turkey. The lifeless gallinacean lay on a board before her, and under the old lady's skillful manipulation rapidly assumed the aspect of a respectable table bird. His sleek and well rounded anatomy, together with his extensive avoirdupois, more than compensated his late benefactress and later executioner, for all labor expended upon him.

Aunt Sophie was lost in admiration of her subject when the door opened and in came old Jenkins, the hired man, from the wood pile to warm his numbed fingers at the kitchen fire.

"What think you of that for a bird?" demanded the artist, triumphantly, displaying her handiwork.

"Well enough," was the unsympathetic rejoinder, "it will satisfy the stomach but for a day and then it will be done with."

"Wind not right to-day Jenkins?" enquired Aunt Sophie, good naturedly. "How—rheumatism these days?"



Army Service Corps distributing bully-beef to the firing line

was the first wet blanket to the old lady's ardor, but she merely dropped a tear of disappointment on the missive and laid it away with the reflection, "Well we'll just have to manage without 'em, that's all."

"What a feast it will be, and not at noon either, but a real fashionable six o'clock dinner, like the city folks. There'll be the big fat turkey gobbler as I've stuffed for six good weeks, the puddens, the mince pies, the tarts filled with blackcurrants off my own bushes, and cream from the Jersey herself. Then to top off, the Christmas tree in the parlor." Aunt Sophie went over this mental summary with rapidly increasing satisfaction at least nine times daily.

The company was to comprise ten invited guests, in addition to Uncle Reuben and Aunt Sophie, with Sally the maid of all work to wait at table. And it was all to be kept as a surprise from Uncle Reuben.

The morning of Christmas eve found Aunt Sophie early astir. Sally had been left in charge of the kitchen with instructions to polish up the dinner set, which had not been used since Thanksgiving Day, while Aunt Sophie undertook to make ready the guest chamber, "in case any of them settled to stay the night." She was in the midst of this operation when Sally, wearing a rather rueful countenance, appeared at the doorway.

"What now?" demanded her mistress apprehensively, "you ain't been breaking any of the chiny?"

"No, no," Sally corrected, "taint that, Aunt Sophie, but Johnny's just come round to say as mother's got one of her bad spells and wants me home right off."

Aunt Sophie reflected a moment. "Well go long," she said, "only mind you're back by noon to-morrer."

To the latter question Jenkins vouchsafed no reply.

"Wind's wrong," he muttered, "always wrong. Nothings right no more." "Wait till you've done your duty by this turkey, then you'll see things a sight different," she told him.

"Don't make no difference anyhow," the old man went on speculatively, "I'm a stranger and an outcast from my family. Time was when I could festivate with the best of them and keep Christmas at home, with wife and children too, but when a man gets old the world ain't got no more lollipops for him."

"Why don't you go home for Christmas, Jenkins?" asked Aunt Sophie, practically.

"Can't get away."

"Come now," persuaded the old lady, "you go home, we'll get along alright till you get back."

Suddenly the door-latch lifted and in walked unannounced a big shaggy wolf-hound.

"Git out you brute," growled Jenkins, half rising to eject the unbidden guest.

"Let him be, Jenkins," Aunt Sophie interposed, "he's half starved, poor creature; maybe I can find him a bit of waste now and agen."

"Throw a dog a bone," grumbled the other prophetically, "and he'll take the joint when your back's turned."

"Come Jenkins, ain't you going? Train ain't in for another half hour. You've time aplenty fer the run down."

Jenkins shook his head dubiously. "I'd go in a minute," he said, "but I ain't got the money."

Aunt Sophie laid down her knife. "How much does it cost," she asked, "to take you there?"

"Full ten dollars, there and back," Jenkins told her promptly.

The old lady had an inspiration, she turned and left the room without a word.