

MY CHRISTMAS FAIRY.

See her standing with crown and with sceptre.
Little queen of Love's kingdom to-night;
Every heart will adore and accept her.
For love is her right.

A little head crowned with berries;
A little brow clouded with doubt;
Little lips that are redder than cherries.
Too pretty to pout.

A little fay dressed for the fairies;
A little court waiting without;
A court where no sin and no care is.
Your kingdom, no doubt.

Do you think of the part you are playing,
As you stand with that fair drooping head—
What thoughts through your little brain straying,
Will live there unsaid?

The wild wind is sweeping through cloudland;
The firelight glows fervent and red;
The white snow is weaving a shroud-band
For hours that are dead.

The joy-bells ring out through the night-air;
The old King of Winter draws near;
In the glow and the gleam of the light there
His welcome you hear.

O lips that are sweeter than laughter,
Smile too at the Christmas King's birth;
Let the shadows and sorrows come after
Our season of mirth.

Throw off those grave thoughts, little fairy;
Give kisses and smiles for to-night;
Or if of cares you're chary,
Look on with delight.

There are hearts that may ache some hereafter
For the lustre that lives in your eyes,
And the red lips that break into laughter,
Or tremble with sighs.

But the spell of the young years that bind you,
Is sacred and holy and sure;
As we leave you, I would we might find you,
So gentle and pure.

RITA.

Seven Christmas Eves.

BY MRS. ALEXANDER ROSS.

CHAPTER I.

We had a handsome as well as a happy home in Scotland; pictures of my forefathers for three hundred years back embellished the walls of the dining-room; while our sideboard was loaded with gold and silver plate, heir-loom in the family, which our richer neighbours could not boast of, and of which they envied us the possession.

I was fourteen years old when a sad change came over all this; my father had engaged in some speculation, a railway or some such spend-money which turned out a failure for the first who undertook the business, and made the fortunes of more fortunate or perhaps clearer-headed men who took their place. Woe for us, we had to leave our happy home with its pleasant parlours, opening into conservatories bright with many-hued flowers, or gardens, with their broad green walks. The forest trees, under whose shade we had played from childhood, whose very trunks and swaying green branches were home to us, we were to know no more forever.

My father and mother could not brook the pity of some, the averted look of others who a year previous considered themselves honoured by an invitation to our house. And so it was decided that we should cross the wide Atlantic and seek a home where the poor from east, north and south all go and find "bread and to spare," among the energetic men and kindly women of Canada.

My mother must have had more command over herself than most women possess. I never heard her utter a word of regret as the shores of her native land faded from her sight; or give an impatient look or gesture while she, who had been accustomed to be waited on from her childhood, cared for and attended four little ones, under six years of age, unaided except by such assistance as I, a girl of fourteen, and a brother, two years my elder, could give.

My father entertained the most sanguine hopes of retrieving his fortune in the western world. He had before leaving Scotland secured a situation in a large mercantile house in Montreal; and, as each day brought us nearer our destination, used to express his impatience to be at work again. The last evening we were on board he called to my mother who was putting her little ones to bed; "leave the children, Agnes, Archie will stay with them, come out and enjoy the glorious sunset."

My mother and I joined him on deck to see the sun setting with a radiance which in our cloudy northern home we had never dreamed of. "There is a harbinger of our success," said my father, pointing to the setting sun. "As the glory of that sunset we now look on, is to what we have ever seen before, so will the fortune I shall make here, be to what we have lost."

"Dear George, you are my fortune," replied my mother clasping one of his hands in both her own. "Where you are, to me, is perfect happiness. I would rather be a slave in bondage by your side, than wanting you, share in all this world hath power to give."

"Dearest; you have been to me light and blessing. I have known no real sorrow since I brought you as my bride to Marsden; although you have allowed no sigh of regret to pass your lips, or shade of sadness to cross your brow, I know too well what your woman's heart must have suffered in leaving the home so hedged round with pleasant memories—the birthplace

of our children." As my father spoke he raised the hand still clasped in his own to his lips, and looking fondly down into her eyes said, "fear not, darling, you will yet return to Marsden and be the richest lady that ever lived within the old walls."

Prophetic words! How fulfilled!

It was the evening of the next day ere we arrived at our destination. Never shall I forget the scene of wonder the wharf with its busy life presented to my untutored eye, as we disembarked; the crowds hurrying to and fro among the things wonderful the stranger from the small quiet cities of Scotland sees in Montreal.

My brother, the three eldest children, together with an energetic girl named Catherine, whom my mother engaged on board ship, were placed in a conveyance and sent off to the boarding house in St. Catherine street, where rooms had been engaged for us by a friend.

My father placed mamma, myself and the baby in another conveyance, his foot was on the step ready to take his place beside us when something startled the horses of a carriage close by, and in their fright they rushed against the one we were seated in, causing the horses to rear and the carriage to sway heavily to one side. My father jumped down and the door closed with a bang as the coachman got his horses to resume a natural position; a shrieking noise as of several voices calling in horror struck on my ear; I put my head out through the open window. Oh God! Oh God! My father's head and breast were under the stamping feet of two terrified horses his life blood dabbled the ground. A splash of something warm on my face; merciful heaven it is my father's blood!

We lived in that pretty wooden cottage at the corner of Willow street, Longueuil, where the street door entered into our parlour. During the first two years my mother existed, we could scarcely call her living, she neither smiled nor sighed; spoke only in answer to questions and then it was yes, or no; in all these two years no other word ever passed her lips. Her hair as she sat for two days and two nights by my father's mutilated body was rich auburn which shone like burnished gold when the sunshine fell on it; it was now "white as the snow on Salmon." Her eyes had all their old blue with its depth of softness, but they knew no change, ever intently gazing out on the quiet street, whether in daylight or darkness.

Catherine Simpson, the girl my mother hired on board ship, was the angel of our household; she was nurse, cook, and chamber-maid to us all, and in her own quiet, loving way, mother to the little ones.

She had an idea that I was quite a musician because I could play by ear the wild mountain airs by which she lulled the children to sleep, and so she kept me practicing and studying my old lesson books in hopes that when Archie made a fortune, which she had full faith in his ability to do, I would be an accomplished young lady. Save the mark! poor humble me an accomplished lady! How I toiled for that distinction during these two long years.

Christmas eve was a great festival with us in Scotland perhaps the more so with us as a family, because it was on Yule day that Sir Humphrey Denholm was knighted, and the ring he wore three hundred years ago with the quaint old legend engraved inside, was always put in the great Yule Bannock after it was baked, the happy one to whose share that piece of cake fell being sure of success and happiness until Yule night came again.

The first Christmas eve after our arrival in America passed unheeded, it was the first Christmas that alas, alas! Archie had a right to his title of Sir Archibald.

Before we left Scotland my father had resolved to preserve a strict silence on the subject of his title, and the more to favour this my mother's name and his own were entered on the ship's passenger list as Mr. and Mrs. Denholm.

Our second Christmas eve was like unto the first, but that Catherine of her own accord treated us that day to plum pudding and Christmas goose. No one noticed the dinner in words, but when twilight came with its shadows, Archie and I sat apart with clasped hands, and in hushed whispers spoke of the great Christmas log that used to burn in the old hall at Marsden, and as we looked up at the old household clock which we had brought across the sea, and heard it strike amid the gloom and silence of our quiet room 1—2—3—4—5—6, the dinner hour at Marsden, where with fifty invited guests the evening time sped on amid light and song, our heads drooped close together and hot tears fell on our clasped hands.

The third Christmas came as Christmas will come to the end of time—to one in sorrow, to another in joy. Archie had trusted me in the morning with the secret that he was to receive a Christmas present of fifty dollars from his employers, and in order to make a little pleasure for us all he was to spend it in Christmas presents, one of which was to be a huge cake, he having determined to put mamma to give us Sir Humphrey's ring to ask in it.

Christmas eve came round and the old clock pointed to half-past five as Archie arrived laden with his presents. The boys were loud in their demonstrations of joy over a joint-stock rocking horse, while Mabel's blue eyes drooped with almost motherly love on the beautiful face of her wax doll, baby crowing with delight over a musical rattle. There were also nine-pins, drums, trumpets, I can scarcely remember all;

our little parlour seemed to have been turned into a toy shop; there was a ring for me, a dress for Catherine who deserved it so well, and a beautiful Bible bound in white and gold for mamma.

As Archie presented mamma with her present, he showed her the Christmas cake, begging her to put Sir Humphrey's ring into it. She took the Bible from his hand and pressed her lips to his cheek in token of thanks; but from the cake she turned away, lifting and waving her hand as if she fain would banish it from her sight.

A few minutes afterwards Mabel came and whispered, "Mamma is crying." Blessed tidings! happy tears! The fountain of her tears had been sealed since the day on which my father's dead body met her gaze. This was better than Sir Humphrey's ring a hundred fold. This was the first Christmas eve we had a semblance of happiness in Canada. Ere Christmas Day dawned, Archie, our bread-winner, was stretched on a fever bed from which for six long weeks he never rose.

What was to be done! The money we brought with us from Scotland was nearly all gone; it was by the exercise of the utmost economy it had lasted so long. I looked at my idle hands and asked myself "Is there nothing I can do? I am strong and willing, surely I can work too."

That evening an advertisement caught my eye. Edmonston and Fornam wanted a proof-reader.

I took Catherine into my confidence. At first she showed all a Scotchwoman's prejudice against a lady, the daughter of a titled gentleman, working for her bread. But at last when I explained to her how low our finances were, and that the doctor had said it might be months before Archie would again be able to work, her mind took a practical view of the case.

I went that day to Edmonston and Fornam's and asked to see the foreman as the advertisement desired. He asked a few questions—my answer seemed to impress him favourably, and bidding me follow him I was in a few minutes ushered into a small room where an old gentleman sat writing.

"There is a young lady, Mr. Edmonston, who I think will make a good proof-reader in Miss Wilson's place," said the foreman. The gentleman thus addressed asked a few questions as to my ability to write and spell, ending by requesting me to write to his dictation. I did so for upwards of five minutes. My work was, he said, "wonderfully good, considering it was my first attempt," and at once desired that I should be engaged at a salary of four dollars a week. I worked in that office nearly five years a happy girl. Dear Montreal, the dearest place in all the world. Your green, grassy squares, with their sparkling fountains; your poplars and maples hold more romance for me than all the trees of the forest.

CHAPTER II.

"The darkness is always greatest before dawn." My dear brother was two months on a bed of sickness, twice in that time his life was despaired of; but this new trial aroused our mother from the lethargy of grief she had been under for two years. She alone nursed him, watched by his pillow day and night, and, at last, when he was able to walk by her side on the soft green grass under the trees on the Chambly road, she took up her harp of rejoicing, praising the Lord in joyfulness of soul.

The gentleman who engaged me was Mr. Edmonston's eldest son, at that time a young man of twenty-five years of age. He was the best and kindest; upright and true. He was almost worshipped by every man and woman who served his father.

To me he was a dream of heaven from the time when, as a girl of sixteen years of age, I entered his father's employment. I never thought of him as a lover; I would as soon have thought of falling in love with the angel Gabriel. But that I might deserve and win the praise he never failed to give to all, even to the poor scrubbing woman, if she did her work well, I strove with all my heart, and strength, and spirit to do everything as he would have it done,—to be perfect, to copy him.

I had set myself a high standard. He was the friend of all, his heart a kindly fountain with perpetual flow, knowing better than any one I ever met how to call forth the highest feelings of the heart, those traits which give a brighter glow to things of earth, and each of us possess more or less.

He had all the higher impulses which decorate our nature, and yet he pitied where others less pure and noble would blame; his soul rose unconfined from our lower paths up to God. He sought the confidence of all, the meanest as well as the foremost man and woman who served his father; and he gained not only their confidence, but their reverence and love. The establishment was one of the largest in Montreal. Magazines, newspapers, and books of all kinds were published there, and Walter Edmonston, his name now ranking as one of the first in the literature of his land, was the one who had the general superintendence of all literary work belonging to the private office. All original matter passed through his hands.

I had another strong motive to make my work such as would please my employers, and one which pressed on me every day. I knew that if Archie's illness ended fatally (and for twelve long months he never won a dollar), my mother and the children must eat the bread I could win and no other.

For this I tried with a will and force which even to myself seemed supernatural, to improve my handwriting, that it might be without mistake, and so even as to be read with the same ease as printed matter. I knew that I would be paid in the exact ratio that my work deserved.

I had been in their employment a little more than three months, when one day the senior partner came into the room where I worked along with several girls and two gentlemen, all correctors of the press or copyists of manuscript. He walked slowly round, looking over the work of each as he passed behind our chairs, and, like his son, giving a word of encouragement, praise or advice, as it seemed needful. I felt his breath on my neck as he stooped over my chair, evidently bending down that he might the better inspect my work. My heart was palpitating so that I could feel every beat against the arm on which I leaned.

"Aye," said he, after inspecting my work at least a minute, "this is something we do not meet always. Walter, look here."

His son came up to where Mr. Edmonston stood behind my chair, and, excusing himself, lifted the manuscript I was writing from before me, saying, in an undertone, "This is the young lady of whom I spoke."

"Capital! as good as print!" was the reply, in a hearty voice.

"And of such work twenty pages and over a day," said his son.

"Well, Walter, you'll look to that on the first."

On the first of the month, which was the day we received our salary, I was paid six dollars a week, instead of four.

A few weeks after this, while we were at tea one night, Archie had a fit of coughing, which ended in his spitting up and at last vomiting a quantity of blood.

I immediately ran for the nearest doctor, but he, on seeing my brother, advised that the physician regularly attending him should be sent for at once, as it might be very serious or otherwise, according to the nature of the case, of which no one could judge so well as the medical man who had attended him all along, adding, "He had better be sent for without delay."

It was now nearly eight o'clock, and I dared not go to Montreal at so late an hour alone. Taking Catherine with me, we proceeded to St. Catherine street, where Dr. Turnbull lived. Arrived there, we were told that Archie was then attending a wedding party, and one of the villas above Sherbrooke street, and might not be at home until far in the night.

I at once resolved to go for him, so, obtaining the address, we took a cab to convey us to the house.

The place we sought was a handsome villa residence, surrounded by more than ordinary extent of pleasure grounds, embellished with great old trees, whose long drooping branches swept the green sward. The grounds were lit up by a profusion of Chinese lanterns, some of them little tiny things, emitting only a sparkle of light; others, great globes, blazing in gold and purple and crimson, making the trees they hung on look like trees from fairy-land. The little plots of flowers amid the closely-shaven green, mossy sward, showing by the light of the lanterns a radiance of glorious colour they never knew by day.

The house was a handsome gothic cottage; the light streaming from the windows throwing one set of pillars into deep shadow, while others stood out in bright relief, capital and base seen as distinctly as by daylight. The air would have been oppressive on that mild September night but for the numerous fountains throwing up great jets of water in all grotesque ways. Over all, the broad hunter's moon sailing in her quiet beauty high up in the cloudless sky, shed a grace and radiance all her own.

Catherine left the carriage to find the doctor and deliver her message to him, while I sat entranced gazing into a handsomer room than any I had seen since I left Marsden, where elegantly-dressed fair women and their partners were dancing or walking in couples. The windows reaching from floor to ceiling must have been made so as to slide into panels behind the gothic pillars, which alone separated them, as the whole front of the room, forming a semicircle, was wide open to the lawn.

A lady and gentleman came out on the lawn, so near the carriage, where I sat hidden by the shadow of the great trees, that I could with ease distinguish their features and even hear each word they spoke.

The lady was attired in the pure white satin robe and gauzy flowing veil of a bride, only, instead of orange blossoms, she wore blue forget-me-nots. She was a woman of rare beauty, her whole face and figure expressing dignity and grace; her beautifully-formed head seemed to carry itself with a hauteur which, like "Vashti the beautiful," would ignore the admiration of all save he to whom she had given her heart.

The lady so entranced me, that it was only when her companion spoke some words in reply that, struck by the voice, I looked and beheld Walter Edmonston!

The lady's bracelet came unfastened and fell on the ground at her feet. He picked it up, replaced it on the white wrist, and then, putting his arm round her waist, kissed her cheek.

In that moment I knew that "Vashti, the beautiful," was Walter Edmonston's bride. They turned and again entered the room among the dancers. I felt as if my heart was turned to stone—as if every pulse had ceased to beat. I could not then ask myself why their great happiness seemed as it were the death knell of