

Christine's Christmas

Written for Western Home Monthly by W. R. Gilbert, Calgary.

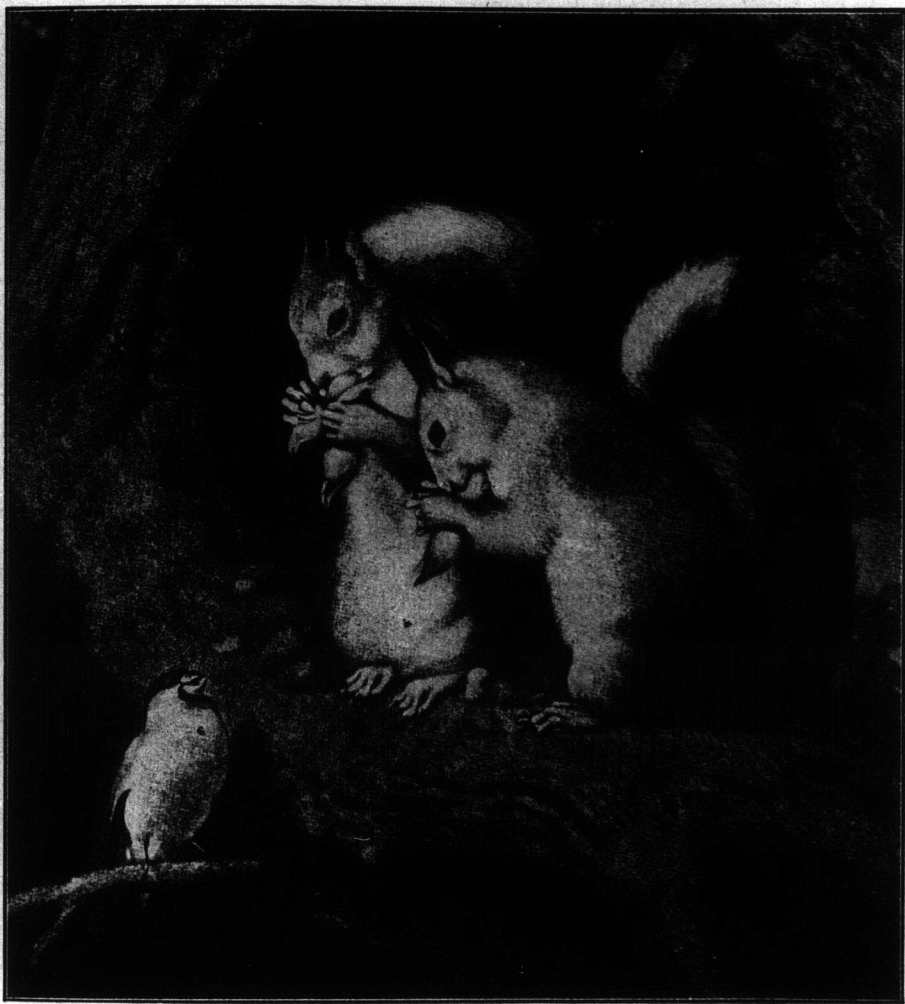
IT WAS a dull December day and very cold, colder indoors than out; so at least thought little Christine Denbigh as she busily dusted the draughty schoolroom of Miss Cubbitt's seminary for young ladies. Christine's small round face, which looked as though it were made for dimples and smiles, was despondent to-day.

Dusting the schoolroom was no easy task, for every nook and cranny would be subsequently examined by Miss Cubbitt, and if a speck of dust was to be seen anywhere a severe scolding was sure to be the result. Christine wondered rather sadly why Miss Cubbitt, whose manner towards her had formerly been sweetness itself, should in the course of three short weeks

into a home where destitute children were fed, clothed and educated.

This morning Christine had been again summoned to Miss Cubbitt's presence and told that the application for admittance had been accepted, and that she would be received into the Home as soon as possible after Christmas. In the meantime Miss Cubbitt had not refrained from making use of the little girl, and she had been despatched on errands, ordered to dust the rooms and to help to stone the raisins, and given several other small duties.

At this moment a sharp voice ordered her to hurry up and finish the dusting, for she was required to go to the butcher's in the next street. Having got her hat and a basket, the little girl set forth. Her way



The songster rendering sweet melody to the hungry squirrels

have become sour, cross-grained, and fault-finding.

Just over three years ago a cab had drawn up before the front door of this seminary, and from it there had alighted a tall gentleman, holding by the hand a small girl, beautifully dressed, and carrying a wax doll almost as big as herself, with golden hair and china blue eyes.

The tall gentleman had been Mr. Denbigh, the small girl Christine. Although at that time Christine had been only seven, she remembered clearly how deferential Miss Cubbitt had been to her father as he explained that he was going abroad for an indefinite period and was entrusting his motherless daughter to her care.

Christine had never seen him since, but he had written frequently kind, affectionate letters, urging her to be good and patient at school until the happy day arrived when he should come and fetch her away and they should live together.

The last letter was the shortest of all, but the one Christine loved above all others, for in it her father had stated that he was starting for home immediately and if all went well, would be in England within a month.

And then just a week after he had sailed the terrible announcement appeared in the papers that the ship had gone down in mid-ocean and all lives were lost.

Christine had been summoned to the drawing room and briefly acquainted with the dreadful facts; she was also told that it was impossible for Miss Cubbitt to maintain a penniless child, and that an application would be made for her admittance

lay through a very quiet thoroughfare, and a barrel organ bursting into tune just behind startled her not a little. The air was a very gay one, and as Christine stopped to listen she began involuntarily to beat her feet in time to the music. She had always been very fond of dancing, and now as the tune merrily proceeded she could not resist dancing a few steps which she had invented on the spur of the moment. Having once begun, she found it hard to stop, and she did not cease until the sudden stoppage of the music made her look round quickly.

The organ grinder was coming towards her. "See 'ere, Missy," he said, "that dancin' o' yours kinder caught my fancy. I feels inclined to make you an offer as I wouldn't make to every one. What do you say to coming round with me to-day and dancin' to the toons? I'd give yer two cents on every quarter I makes, an' yer couldn't find better pay than that anywheres."

Christine caught her breath for a moment. How delightful it would be to enjoy herself for just this one day! As soon as Christmas was over she would be sent to the home for destitutes. There would be no opportunity for dancing there, she knew well. This was certainly an opportunity not to be lost. The bargain was sealed without delay, and she took up her position beside the organ.

But the man had no intention of remaining where he was. Telling Christine to follow, he made his way through a labyrinth of streets until they reached a spot quite unknown to her. There he halted

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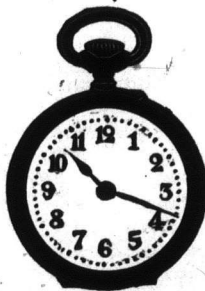
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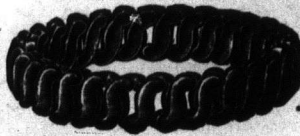
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